

YELLOW WOOD NOTES

An Occasional Publication
for the Benefit of
Our Clients, Colleagues, and Friends

Summer 2000

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We Welcome Your Comments

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Update on Our Work: Community-Based Measurement

Analyzing Indicators in a Systems Context

The Missouri Association of Community Task Forces held a fascinating conference in March in Branson, Missouri that brought together providers of economic development, health, mental health, law enforcement, and substance abuse prevention services with community folks. The purpose was for participants to see beyond symptoms and develop a shared understanding of underlying causes and opportunities for change.

Shanna Ratner provided a key note address for change agents in action. She then introduced participants to a tool we have developed to assist groups in analyzing indicators in a systems

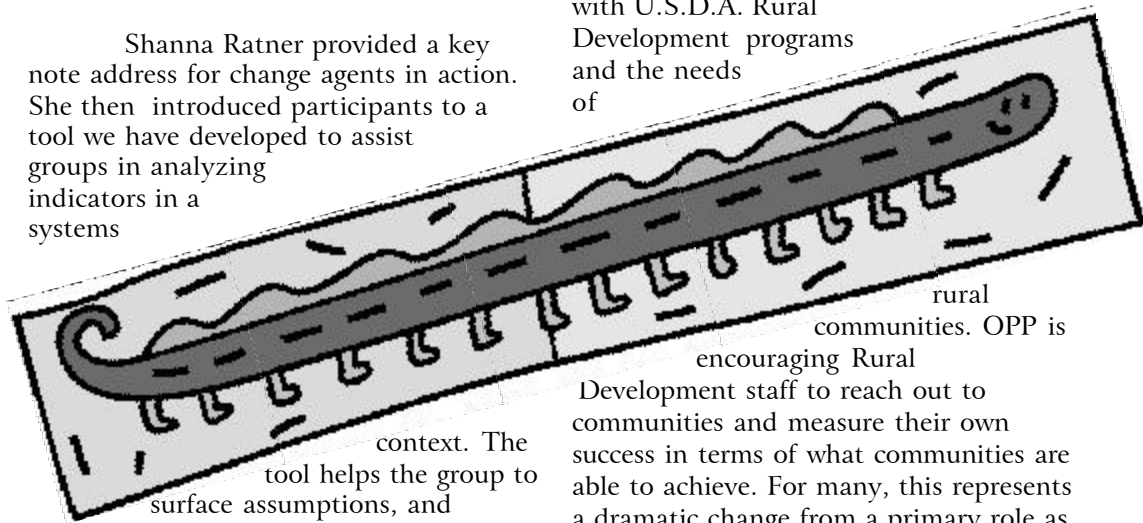
context. The tool helps the group to surface assumptions, and identify key leverage points to bring about systemic change. The feedback on Yellow Wood's contribution was positive and enthusiastic:

"Finally, a concrete way to assist my teams to attack goal-setting in a way they can understand!! My teams definitely are not dumb-- they/we just haven't found a way to genuine agreement on goals...no one wants to "hurt" someone's feelings."

". . . I have needed a "focusing" process for groups for a long time. Thanks!!"

You Get What You Measure Goes to Washington

Shanna Ratner of Yellow Wood Associates teamed up with Daryl Hobbs, rural sociologist and Director of the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis at the University of Missouri to provide measurement training to USDA Rural Development employees from around the country in Silver Spring, Maryland in June. USDA Office of Policy and Planning (OPP) invited Yellow Wood's participation based on our familiarity with U.S.D.A. Rural Development programs and the needs of



rural communities. OPP is encouraging Rural Development staff to reach out to communities and measure their own success in terms of what communities are able to achieve. For many, this represents a dramatic change from a primary role as a program administrator to a primary role as a community facilitator.

The training emphasized the importance of assisting communities in setting their own goals and determining the actions they need to take while finding measures of progress that are meaningful at the community, state, and federal levels simultaneously.

Update on Our Work: Community-Based Measurement

Using Measurement to Focus Research & Test Assumptions

Debra Mason challenged researchers, practitioners, and community representatives to clarify their needs for information in a 2-hour workshop titled "What Do You Really Want, and How Will You Know When You Get It?" at an international conference on community-based research held at Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA. The workshop was designed to demonstrate the use of tools and materials from YWA's community-based measurement process to build capacity for communities to participate in and use the results of research.

The conference was part of an initiative by Loka Institute of Amherst, MA to build an international network to support research which responds directly to community needs, and incorporates community participation. This year's conference featured presentations and workshops based upon four themes.

Capacity Building for Sustainability explored topics such as participatory evaluation, funding, and

building university infrastructure for community-based research. Tools & Techniques featured workshops offering how to's including research partnerships, community use of information technology, and experiential learning. A track on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture explored how to build cross-class working relationships and methods for addressing power differences inherent within the community, as well as between researchers and community members. Finally, a track on Communication and Ethics featured sessions on guidelines for participatory research, engaging citizens, and reaching out to under-served communities.

It's clear that community-based research requires building a new set of relationships among people who have not traditionally shared information or worked cooperatively. Conference participants found the measurement process a useful one, especially for examining assumptions about the motives and experience of others, and about the options for achieving their goals.

About Yellow Wood Notes . . .

Yellow Wood Notes is a twice yearly publication of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. Our purpose in publishing this newsletter is to maintain contact and share ideas with friends, colleagues, and clients. We appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. is a private, for-profit firm specializing in rural economic research and training for community capacity building. We provide clients with customized analyses and models of successful intervention in rural areas around the U.S. and abroad. Our clients include small towns; non-profit organizations; federal, state, and county governments; foundations; and the private sector.



Social Capital New Hampshire Style

The foundation of social capital is mutually respectful relationships based on trust and reciprocity. Not all relationships contribute to social capital. For example, members of a local school board may meet on a regular basis, but their relationships with one another may be distrustful and disrespectful. Only relationships embedded in the norms of trust, reciprocity and mutual respect contribute to social capital.

According to researchers, social capital consists of a combination of relationships among people with a lot in common (sometimes called “bonding” relationships) and relationships among people with little in common (sometimes called “bridging” relationships). Social capital also includes both relationships that are casual and intermittent and relationships that are close and ongoing. These are sometimes referred to as “weak” and “strong” ties, respectively. Social capital exists at the individual level

and collectively. For example, an individual may have networks that are beneficial to him or her, and a community may have norms of behavior that are widely shared and do not belong to any one individual. Although researchers don’t yet understand how social capital becomes generalized or all the ways in which generalized social capital benefits individuals, there is clearly a significant synergy between levels.

Shanna Ratner is working with the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation’s Social Capital Working Group to explore how the Foundation can identify and encourage grantees who wish to include creating social capital among their project goals. For more information on social capital and its importance in development, check out Robert Putnam’s new book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Also, keep your eye out for the results of the first national benchmark survey on social capital to be released in December, 2000.

See The Forest Wins Ticket For Travel To Additional States

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program has awarded YWA Phase II funding to customize **See the Forest**, our community forestry training program, for use in five to six additional states. YWA conceived of and designed **See the Forest** to assist rural communities in developing the capacity to effectively consider their forest resource in local decisions about conservation and economic development. During Phase I, we created workshop materials and content in cooperation with two Vermont conservation commissions. The five-

module program includes information and activities to address forest health, the local forest economy, institutional relationships, and integrating forest resource use and protection into community and economic development planning. The new funding provides YWA with the opportunity to customize **See the Forest** materials in response to the interest of sponsors in other states. The sponsors will collaborate with YWA to customize the materials, fund program delivery, and select communities to participate in the workshops.

Puzzler

An Audio/Vocal Challenge: Solve the puzzles by saying them out loud - over & over, faster & faster. Keep repeating the phrase until you can hear the answer. Answers are on Page 7.

1. Shock Cussed Toe (a person)
2. Sand Tackle Laws (a fictional character)
3. My Gulch Hoard Un (a person)
4. Mow Bead Hick (a book)
5. Tall Mischief Her Sun (a person)
6. Chick He Tub An An Us (a product)
7. Though Tight An Hick (a thing)
8. Buck Spun He (a fictional character)
9. Caress Trougher Clump Us (a person)
10. Docked Hearse Whose (a person)
11. Tub Raid Heap Hunch (an old TV Show)
12. Age Ant Hub Blows Heaven (a fictional character)
13. Thumb Ill Key Wake Owl Licks He (a place)
14. These Hound Dove Moo Sick (a movie)

N Y State Land Certified

Over 700,000 acres of New York State multiple-use forest land outside the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves have met rigorous criteria established by the international Forest Stewardship Council to receive certification by SmartWood. The criteria assess the long-term ecological, social, and economic impacts of forest management. The certification assessment of the New York forest lands required extensive public involvement, since the lands are owned by the public. YWA assisted the National Wildlife Federation's Northeast Natural Resource Center, SmartWood's regional administrator, in designing and implementing public involvement activities including key informant interviews, a series of public discussion sessions, and an advisory council.

Suggested Reading

The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations by Peter Senge et al, 1999. A sequel to Senge's *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, this book is most directly applicable to people working in large corporations or other large bureaucracies who face the challenge of sustaining and diffusing change within a larger, well-established corporate culture. For those of us who are privileged to work in small organizations, it's an excellent guide to how things fall apart and, to a lesser extent, what can be done about them. Fewer hands-on tools than *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, but lots of interesting recommended reading. ~Shanna Ratner

Home Fires by Margaret Maron, 1998. One of several mysteries based on the author's extensive knowledge of southern culture in our times. The main character is an utterly believable unmarried woman who happens to be a judge and the youngest child in a family with many sons. This particular story revolves around a series of church burnings and offers insights into everything from southern cuisine to race relations to small town judicial systems. ~Shanna Ratner

Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing & Life by Anne Lamott, 1994. This book stands out as the best of everything I've read over the last year: It made me laugh; it made me think; it even made me think about writing. Lamott shares her experiences as writer and writing teacher to illustrate some new ways to really see and hear the characters and situations which surround us every day. ~Debra Mason

Performance Standards for Community Services:

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For several years now YWA has been working with communities and community advocates to assess the economic and fiscal impacts of growth. In doing so, we've noticed how often communities here in Vermont describe their public services - library, recreation, emergency rescue, fire, police, roads and transportation, schools, and social services - in terms of inputs. They count the number of people on staff, the number of fire trucks, or the size of the buildings used to house services. What they usually don't consider is outcomes like the average response time for emergency rescue vehicles or the number of books borrowed from the library per resident per year.

When looking toward the future, and the potential impacts of population growth, communities tend to say, "We've done alright so far, we'll manage in the future, too," thus sweeping under the rug any serious analysis of costs and benefits.

Very few communities seem to have devoted any real thought or discussion to desirable standards of service. Without a desired standard of service, it is impossible to measure the costs per unit of service delivery, to think clearly about alternative ways of delivering the desired services, or to complete a cost-benefit analysis of alternatives.

When the Conservation Law Foundation approached us to assist them in helping the town of Shelburne, Vermont consider potential impacts of a sewer line expansion, we saw an opportunity to explore standards of service further. We assumed there must be organizations that set standards for various types of services, perhaps even by size of community. To some extent, we were right, but to a great extent, we were wrong.

For example, the Vermont Department of Libraries publishes a biennial report of library statistics for every library in the state with such measures as the number of volumes per capita, the total periodical subscriptions, and the percent of the population registered. Very few of these measures, with the exception of per capita circulation, really get at the value of the library to residents based on the extent of use.

Other areas, such as emergency services, fire and police services, have no outcome standards established by their respective associations. Their standards strictly measure inputs like training and equipment, but do not begin to suggest desired outcomes. Recreation is in the middle, offering recommendations for amenities based on population size, but no comparative measures.

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Creating New Options to Meet Local Needs



Based on our research, there appears to be a tremendous opportunity for communities to discuss and ultimately establish desired standards for local public services. They can then determine how their current services measure up and estimate the cost for improvements to meet the desired standards. Further, once desired standards are in place, the cost of meeting these standards for a growing population can be estimated.

In the process, communities can consider alternative methods of service delivery and become more creative in finding ways to meet their needs.

Only when communities set standards and measure services against them can they begin to truly grasp the costs involved in improving levels of service and maintaining desired standards as the population grows.



Community Service Standards: Why? & How?

From the perspective of local officials or public service staff, one of the most compelling reasons to develop local standards for community services is to engage local residents, property owners, and businesses in a discussion of what level of service they really want from their local fire department, library, highway department, etc., and the trade offs they're willing to make to achieve and maintain it. For example, a town might adopt a standard of service that 85 percent of residents benefit directly from library services - through borrowing books, participating in programs, or using computers. The first step would be to determine the number and percentage of residents who now benefit from library services, and those who don't. The second step might be to determine what the barriers and opportunities are to spreading the benefits to a larger percentage of the population. Then, through discussion with residents, library staff, and perhaps others such as day care providers, the community could develop a plan to meet the established standard along with a budget for its implementation. At this point, the cost per resident can be estimated, and based on a number of assumptions, future costs can be projected and considered.



Answers to Puzzler on Page 5

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Jacques Cousteau | 8. Bugs Bunny |
| 2. Santa Claus | 9. Christopher Columbus |
| 3. Michael Jordan | 10. Doctor Seuss |
| 4. Moby Dick | 11. The Brady Bunch |
| 5. Thomas Jefferson | 12. Agent 007 |
| 6. Chiquita Banana | 13. The Milky Way Galaxy |
| 7. The Titanic | 14. The Sound of Music |

89 Go Fish 89

Over the past few months, YWA has assisted the Boquet River Association in evaluating “Leaping with Trout”, an education project involving students and teachers from six middle schools in New York State. Students among the six participating schools obtained brook trout eggs from hatcheries, reared the offspring in their classroom aquariums, then released the young fish in the spring with stocking permits. While raising the fish the students learned about watersheds, water quality, habitat needs, and history.

YWA worked with the teachers to develop criteria to assess progress toward new state educational standards, including community involvement and interdisciplinary approaches to learning.

At a workshop held in October to launch the project, teachers were asked to write down assumptions and expectations in regard to the curriculum. Their responses were used as a baseline for reflection in January after they had received the fish eggs, and again in May when they considered lessons learned.

Teachers were also asked to specify the skills and knowledge they hoped students would gain, and design a process for assessing student status at the beginning and end of the project. Teachers were encouraged to use a format other than a test - one which would result in student expression. YWA will complete the evaluation by analyzing the content of teacher and student writing.

a Local Dairy 2

YWA recently completed a second phase of research to assist dairy farmers of Union County, PA in identifying new market channels for their products. Last year we investigated the potential for a farmer-owned retail store featuring local dairy products. This year we surveyed small “mom and pop” retailers and natural food stores to determine their willingness to cooperate with local dairy farmers in marketing their products. Both projects were sponsored by the Union County Chamber of Commerce.

We used ArcView software and maps downloaded from the web (Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access) to determine the towns and zip codes in the

study area. We purchased a list of all food stores in the area from the Bureau of Food Safety, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. We then conducted a telephone survey of store owners and managers in the study area, achieving a 77 percent rate of response.

The final report included the responses to the survey questions, a list of all stores interested in carrying local dairy products (with full contact information), and an estimate of the gallons of local milk required to meet their demand. The report also noted opportunities and constraints for dairy farmers wishing to sell to local retailers. Maps created in ArcView illustrated the locations of stores who expressed interest in carrying local dairy products.

Environmental Technologies and Rural Development: Starting a Dialogue

For several years now, we at YWA have been aware of an apparent communications gap between people who know and care about environmental technologies, particularly in the private sector, and people who know and care about rural development. One of our core beliefs is that rural communities should be engaged stewards of the natural resource base, even though many communities have either been prevented by higher forms of government and/or private sector dominance from having an effective stewardship role, and some do not yet take this role seriously. Bringing rural communities to what we consider their rightful role as stewards will involve both removing barriers to effective participation as well as proactive

programs of monitoring and technological innovation.

We are intrigued with the advances that have been made in environmentally friendly technologies in areas as diverse as energy, transportation, building systems, industrial inputs, and waste management. We would like to see rural communities benefit from their application.

We are not technologists, but we are actively seeking a dialogue with those who can relate to our vision. Over the next year or so, we would like to begin conversations with technologists and community developers to sharpen our focus and help us figure out the steps that need to be taken to make our vision a reality. If you would like to be part of this conversation, or just offer us feedback, please get in touch.

Environmental Technologies Have A Great Deal to Offer Rural Communities:

- AVOIDED COSTS - for example installing a living system waste filtering process in place of a more costly traditional system
- REDUCED OPERATING COSTS - for example a low-cost biomass energy system that allows public and private dollars to be redirected to other areas of community need
- SKILL DEVELOPMENT & JOB RETENTION related to installation and maintenance of new environmentally friendly technologies
- EXPORT POTENTIAL for services related to installation and maintenance , and, quite possibly, for production of environmentally friendly technologies adapted to the scale of rural communities.

National Community Forestry Center Sprouts Regional Branch in Northern Forest



Since January YWA staff have been busy making the Northern Forest Regional Center of the National Community Forestry Center (NCFC) a reality. NCFC, an initiative of the National Network of Forest Practitioners, is actually a decentralized network of four regional field stations located in the

releases, and conducting workshops to get the word out about the services available through the Center and opportunities to participate. At the same time, we are working to build the partnerships necessary to make the initiative work. We have developed a mailing list of 800 plus organizations and individuals throughout

What Will the Northern Forest Regional Center Actually Do?

- respond to requests for specific forest and wood industry-related information
- conduct targeted research to address region-wide issues and opportunities
- partner with scientists and researchers to engage in participatory research with rural communities
 - provide training in participatory research to lay people and researchers
- link communities with partnering organizations and institutions active in the Northern Forest
 - produce fact sheets and other publications related to key issues and opportunities
 - provide targeted assistance to a limited number of communities each year
 - participate in a national network serving forest communities

Southwest, Southeast, Pacific Northwest, and the Northeast. YWA administers the Northern Forest Regional Center of the NCFC. (NCFC was initially called “The National Resource Center for Rural People in Forest Communities.” See *Yellow Wood Notes*, Winter 2000, pps. 6-7.)

The core purpose of the Northern Forest Regional Center is to help rural people conduct and use research to inform decision-making about forest resources. We will do this by adding value to the work of communities, organizations, and institutions in our region who share a vision of healthy communities and healthy forests.

Over the past few months YWA staff have been meeting with various organizations in the region, speaking with key contacts by phone, issuing press

the region whom we suspect have valuable contributions to make and much to gain from participation. An initial mailing generated responses from a core group of researchers, technical assistance providers, and over forty willing partners.

Our next step is to form a bioregional advisory council to guide the regional center’s research agenda and assist in identifying and selecting communities for targeted assistance. Eventually, our database will be linked with those of the other regional centers.

For more information, or to become involved in the National Community Forestry Center initiative, please contact Lee Williams, National Coordinator (530-284-1022), the Southwest Regional Center through Forest Trust of Santa Fe,

Continued on Page 11

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NM (505-938-8992), the Pacific Northwest Regional Center through Forest Community Research of Taylorsville, CA (530-284-1022), the Appalachian Regional Center through

Mountain Assn. for Community Economic Development of Berea, KY (606-986-1299), or the Northern Forest Regional Center through YWA in St. Albans, VT (802-524-6141).

YWA: 15 In the Year 2000

Thanks

to all those who helped us celebrate by sending the gifts we requested - 15 of something yellow. The longest lasting present came from the Northern Vermont Resource Conservation & Development Area - 15 yellow marshmallow "peeps". We're saving them for next Easter. The first gift we received came from just down the street: The St. Albans Chamber of Commerce sent a unique bouquet - 5 yellow roses, 5 tulips, and 5 sunflowers with a yellow bow, of course. The shortest-lived, and most edible gift was a set of 15 "bacon & eggs" made from pretzels and white chocolate. Contact Judy Howland in North Concord, VT for the recipe. Finally, the award for simple elegance goes to Elaine Wheeler and the staff of the Urban Issues Program at the University of TX at Austin who attached a stack of fifteen yellow post-its to a sheet of their letterhead.

Wow! We're almost ready for a learner's permit!

Yellow Wood Associates came into being in December of 1985 when the Town of Plainfield, Vermont hired us to help them figure out how to retain their rural character. All we knew then was that we wanted to work with rural communities to explore development options based on and compatible with natural resources.

Year by year, project by project, we learned how to do our work better. Over the first six years, YWA grew from essentially a part-time endeavor based in our home in Fairfield, Vermont to a full-time preoccupation.

In 1991, we made the big move to St. Albans and a "real" office. No more loads of laundry between phone calls. All the while we continued to stretch into new areas, beginning with agriculture and

rural landscapes, and branching into wood products, forensics, training and facilitation.

After about ten years in business, we knew enough about what we did to begin to actually market our services, and, a couple years after that, *Yellow Wood Notes* came into being. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have supported us along the way, by trusting us with your concerns and offering us the chance to learn along with you.

Now that we're almost ready to pull away from the curb, we're hoping you'll stay with us for a long, safe, yet challenging drive through the ever-changing scenery we call rural community economic development.

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