

CALEDON



INSTITUTE OF  
SOCIAL POLICY

# **Social Capital and the 'Our Millennium' National Project**

*by*

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**April 2001**

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## *Introduction*

### *Our Millennium*

*Our Millennium* was a special project initiated by the Community Foundations of Canada to mark the new century. Community Foundations of Canada is the national membership organization for local community foundations throughout the country.

*Our Millennium* was designed as a nationwide public engagement program. Its purpose was to use the occasion of the millennium as an opportunity to strengthen and celebrate community. The program invited Canadians to make lasting 'gifts' to their community – group projects or activities that make their communities better places. Canadians were encouraged to make their gift within one of 11 theme areas: youth and children, arts and culture, environment, heritage, connections, recreation, learning, safety and crime prevention, care and support, global citizenship and other.

There was a strong response of Canadians to the invitation – more than 6,500 projects registered involving an estimated 4.6 million participants. Their contributions were recorded in a national gift registry set up as part of a bilingual website that will be housed as a permanent record in the National Archives of Canada. It is, in fact, the first website to be acquired by the National Archives.

*Our Millennium* received the 2000 Peter F. Drucker Award of Merit for Canadian Nonprofit Innovation in respect of its unique contribution to public engagement. In fact, one participant in the national project described the effort as a "living laboratory on social capital."

The analysis of the national gift registry was undertaken to analyze this 'social capital building' in action. The report presents the findings of this analysis.

The methodology for this work included a review of the literature on social capital. The gift registry database was analyzed by assessing each individual entry and classifying it onto a grid with a wide range of categories, outlined in Appendix A. The grid provided us with a summary of projects at a glance – e.g., activity by sector, activity by region. It served as the basis upon which we were able to draw out overall themes and practical lessons.

The report first discusses briefly the overarching concept of social capital. It then identifies the underlying values that helped shape this work. It explores some of the key themes that emerged and provides concrete examples of social capital in action. Finally, the report presents several important 'lessons from the ground' – i.e., what the raw data in the form of 6,558 database entries teach us about national and local efforts to foster civic engagement.

It should be noted that this analysis of the gift registry does not represent an evaluation of the *Our Millennium* project. The report may comment on the scope or extent of overall activity or individual projects in a given theme area. But the analysis was neither designed nor intended to assess the reach of the national initiative or the impact of specific projects. Rather, it sought to explore the common themes that emerged as well as the learnings that will help us understand the challenges of undertaking projects on a national scale.

### *Underlying Values*

The *Our Millennium* project was essentially about giving gifts – but not in the traditional sense of the concept. The type of giving encouraged by the project was entirely voluntary and non-commercial. Its purpose was to foster a ‘sense of community’ in which people came together and felt that they had made an important contribution and had connected with others by virtue of their small, but significant, action.

*Our Millennium* was built on the foundation of uniquely human gifts: care, concern, attention, recognition, appreciation, affirming the reality of others, and celebrating both difference and similarity. The program also gave expression to the concept of reciprocity.

Individuals and communities were encouraged to make a contribution through their time, concern and effort. Their generosity was acknowledged explicitly as well as rewarded implicitly through the knowledge that they had restored or preserved something important; had valued or honoured other people; had helped invest in others through skill building or leadership development; or had provided support to someone who required assistance.

In short, the benefit of the gift was intended to extend beyond the beneficiary. The act of giving also was seen to have intrinsic value to the donor. But it is only in the stock taking – in this case, the analysis of the individual gifts – that the total value of the many and varied contributions can be appreciated.

## *Social Capital*

The *Our Millennium* project both embodies and effectively gives life to the concept of social capital. Robert Putnam, the leading US scholar on this concept, defines social capital as the features of social organization such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit [Putnam 2000]. The leading Canadian researcher in this area, John Helliwell, describes social capital as the relationships, networks and norms that facilitate collective action [Helliwell 2001: 6].

Social capital also can be described as “the ties that bind us to one another, the formal and informal social networks within a community” [Patten 2001]. It is created when people come together out of a shared purpose or goal that goes beyond individual benefits.

Social capital effectively is the product of human relationships, particularly those outside immediate and intimate relationships. It is the resource that arises from interactions and connections among people. In short, social capital is a relational variable that arises between groups rather than a psychological variable embedded within individuals [Woolcock 2001: 13]. It results from the bonds that unify people in common purpose and the trust and security arising from the ongoing relationship.

The basic idea of social capital is that “one’s family, friends and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon in crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and/or leveraged for material gain. Those communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations will be in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability, resolve disputes and/or take advantage of new opportunities. Conversely, the absence of social ties can have an equally important impact” [Woolcock 2001: 12].

“The talk of social capital is not sociological heresy or a sell-out to economics: It simply reflects the reality that our social relationships are one of the ways in which we cope with uncertainty (returning to our family when we lose our job), extend our resources (using alumni networks to secure a good job) and achieve outcomes we could not attain on our own (organizing a parade) [Woolcock 2001: 14].

It is easy to dismiss a concept such as social capital as vague and unmeasurable. But there is growing evidence to the contrary coming from a diverse range of sources. A review of the relevant literature found that social capital contributes to the health and well-being of individuals and communities in a number of significant ways [Guy 2000].

Income inequalities have been found to affect health primarily through the erosion of social capital. Higher crime rates are related closely to declining social capital. Neighbourhood social cohesion, a willingness to intervene for the common good and increased participation in community activities support better child development outcomes for children in their earliest years.

Social capital also has been found to have a major impact upon prosperity, health and self-rated happiness. People with strong networks of relationships tend to be more successful in their careers and live longer. The same conclusion appears to apply to communities and societies in which there are strong and overlapping networks of formal and informal relationships. Individuals in communities and societies with strong social capital tend to be more prosperous, healthier and experience less crime [Helliwell 2001: 6].

Social capital contributes to a cohesive society. Social cohesion has been described as “a set of social processes that help instill in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognized as members of that community” [PRI 2001]. The importance of social cohesion is gaining attention in light of labour market trends that are driving a growing wedge between the rich and poor not only in Canada but also throughout the industrialized world.

Pressures on social cohesion are likely to increase in future as unemployment, low wages, earnings inequality, demographic shifts, technological progress, open trade and greater competition in less constrained marketplaces contribute to economic and social turbulence. The growing diversity of multicultural societies also has created challenges for maintaining social cohesion.

Perhaps most intriguing in the recent literature are the economic studies which are finding that the presence of social capital has a positive impact upon the business climate [McCracken 1998]. Countries deemed to have a high level of social capital tend to perform better economically than countries in which social capital ranks low. Social capital increases the productive potential of a community and, more generally, of a society.

Social health is not simply the product of a strong economy. It is one of the determinants of a well-functioning economy. A productive economy requires a strong social infrastructure.

This emerging research is challenging the conventional wisdom that considers social well-being a fringe benefit of a well-performing economy. The traditional goal has been to create a strong economy in order to reap the associated social benefits. There now appears to be a causal linkage in the other direction as well – from social cohesion, represented by dense networks and social infrastructure, to macroeconomic performance.

In short, the importance of the concept of social capital is being increasingly recognized from a wide range of sources. Its benefits to economic and social well-being are becoming better understood. The current challenge is to find the means to encourage its practice.

Social capital is given concrete expression in several ways – particularly through various forms of civic engagement. Civic engagement is the product generated from citizens investing their time, labour, physical and intellectual resources in community networks outside the direct control of government [Abele et al. 1998].

Engagement in civic life is marked by active participation in public affairs, with an emphasis on shared rather than personal interest. Social capital typically is expressed through participation in associations or social structures of cooperation. These include churches, political parties, neighbourhood associations, sports or teen cultural clubs and cooperatives, and active participation in civic activities such as volunteering or voting [Putnam 2000].

Social capital is also given expression through factors that are intrinsic to the process of community capacity building [Aspen Institute 1996]. Building community capacity essentially involves rethinking the use of community resources. It entails scoping out the broad range of resources available in any given community and understanding that these resources are *assets* to be harnessed for building stronger communities [Kretzmann and McKnight 1995]. Social capital emphasizes the notion of investments that result in benefits not fully appropriated by the individuals making the investments.

Growth of the leadership base, for example, brings new people into community decision-making processes and ensures that they have an opportunity to learn and practise leadership skills. The creation of a widely shared understanding and vision, the development of more effective community organizations and institutions, such as schools, neighbourhood associations and local newspapers, and improved resource utilization by the community all contribute to the definition and achievement of commonly valued goals.

In short, social capital is built and maintained through the active efforts of individuals, groups and organizations. The projects that comprise the *Our Millennium* gift registry embody the many different ways that people in communities act to foster the relationships and norms that enhance their ability to work together for the common good.

## *Key Themes*

The *Our Millennium* effort can be characterized as a national exercise in building social capital in communities. As noted, the purpose of the project was to encourage Canadians to work together to contribute to their communities in some meaningful way. Their shared purpose was to improve the lives of others – whether they lived next door or around the world.

*Our Millennium* invited Canadians to devise their own unique projects. The options were broadly defined in a “Catalogue of Possibilities” that the program prepared and distributed widely across the country. Canadians were encouraged to carry out a project within one of 11 categories: youth and children, arts and culture, environment, heritage, connections, recreation, learning, safety and crime prevention, care and support, global citizenship and other.

Several key themes emerged from the gift registry – which effectively represents a database of 6,558 entries. The analysis of the registry is important in that it identifies how Canadians decided to make a difference in their respective communities. It indicates how Canadians expressed their interests and chose to direct their energies when allowed the freedom to assert their preferences and priorities.

The analysis found that gifts were most frequently given under the three categories of environment (16.4 percent of all registered gifts), heritage (16.3 percent), and children and youth (13.3 percent). Entries in the remaining categories broke down as follows: care and support (11.5 percent of all registered gifts), arts and culture (10.8 percent), connections (9.2 percent), recreation (6.3 percent), learning (5.5 percent), safety and crime prevention (4.8 percent), global citizenship (4.1 percent) and other (1.8 percent).

The themes discussed below cut across the individual gift categories. These themes include gift-giving, learning, leadership development, making connections, inclusion, visioning and celebration. This section discusses the learnings that emerged within each of the key themes. These learnings, in turn, are illustrated through example.

Taken together, the themes present a rich range of activities with respect to the practical application of social capital. The invitation to *gift-giving* affirms the capacity of citizens to contribute to the common good and focusses attention on the specific actions that individuals might take.

The *ability to learn* is the distinctive human faculty that helps turn this potential into reality, not only by developing technical skills but also by enhancing the social skills that enable individuals to join with others to achieve common goals.

**Leadership** is that special capacity to bring people together to accomplish ends that no one individual or organization can achieve alone. Far from being the preserve of a small number of citizens, each person has the ability to assume a leadership role in the context of his or her own actions. Communities with diverse forms of leadership appear to have the resilience and vitality needed to surmount challenges on a consistent basis.

Building social capital is primarily about **creating** constructive **connections** among individuals and groups. Interventions of this kind may involve fostering relationships among people who previously were isolated from one another. They also must be directed at improving relations among people who already interact on a regular basis.

The principle of **inclusion** asserts both the ethical and practical imperative of ensuring that all citizens are able to share in opportunities and responsibilities. Removing the barriers to participation and nurturing the contributions of all citizens maximize the energy and imagination available for tackling the diverse challenges of community life.

**Visioning** serves to define those challenges and formulate collective responses. It enables citizens to locate themselves in a changing reality, articulate the future they desire and mobilize resources in a concerted effort to accomplish their goals.

**Celebration** affirms and rejuvenates all of the preceding themes. While recognizing hardships and challenges, community celebrations are expressions of appreciation. Celebration renews the spirit that enables citizens to seek new ways to link resources and capacities productively.

It should be noted that some of the gift categories in the *Our Millennium* registry also correspond with several of the key themes. For example, while learning is a discrete gift category, it also emerged as a general theme embodied in many different projects across all categories. Similarly, arts and culture is a separate classification in the website registry. But a great many projects employed artistic and cultural activities to give expression to their work.

## ***Gift-giving***

The *Our Millennium* project embodies a set of gifts that groups have made to the community. Gifts that are large and substantial usually are noticed and often get considerable publicity and attention. ***An important message of the Our Millennium project was that small gifts are similarly noteworthy and meaningful.***

A young participant in the Helping Friends project in Calgary, which involved only two friends, shared the following: "I went to my friend's house to play. She knew people with broken arms and legs, so we cleaned their bathrooms for them. It took three hours. We also washed someone's car for them – a small way to make our community better."

*Another significant message embodied in this project is that the giving of gifts is sometimes as meaningful to the donor as it is to the beneficiary.* In short, *the gift is in the giving.* This feeling is evident in the submission from a Hamilton-based knitting group, the Knitters from El Mirador: "The 12 women in our knitting group have been meeting weekly to create our millennium gifts for the young and old in our community. We have been knitting lap rugs for the elderly living in nursing homes and we knitted hats for the premature babies in the hospital nursery. With one exception, all of us are over 70 years of age and we are happy to have the opportunity to contribute to our community."

## ***Learning***

The category of learning was listed as one of the possible headings under which Canadians could register their millennium gifts. But the theme of learning actually cuts across all categories; it is not isolated within one set of activities. In fact, *working in partnership with others appears to help participants learn not only about the substance of their project but also about the process of working together.*

There are many other important ideas that flow from the overall learning theme. For example, *learning often occurs by connecting people both near and far who typically do not have contact with one another. Moreover, long-distance connections were facilitated by the use of information and communications technology.*

In its project Children of the Millennium – Past, Present and Future, for instance, the Children's International Learning Centre pointed out that: "Local young people will learn first-hand about the values, interests and daily routines of others just like themselves in many other countries. The Children's International Learning Centre will use the media of written response, video and taped interviews to present to visitors to our Centre the opinions of far-flung young people. Through our version of 'slow e-mail,' new questions can be posed to each individual featured and visitors will schedule a second session to 'get the answer.' "

*The typical design of learning activities was active, hands-on, focussed on problem-solving and experiential.* The Millennium Learning Garden Project at Linbrook Public School in Linbrook, Ontario, is just one illustration: "Next spring, the students will develop presentation and leadership

skills by giving tours of the woodlot garden to parents and other schools. Since students will need to know the kinds of trees, their characteristics and the names of the plants, it is a definite learning experience for them. Thus the learning gardens are connected to the curriculum and make a great way to learn in the new millennium.”

*There were many examples of highly exploratory and engaging projects that sought to enable people to learn about themselves and realize their capacity to learn and create. The process often was animated by employing new tools and techniques for exploring the world and capturing the insights and lessons learned.*

Focus In: Youth, Art and the Urban Environment undertaken by Foodshare’s Focus on Food Youth Project in Toronto illustrates this theme. “The Focus In project explores the multiple ways that youth relate to the urban environment: to food, to the city, to nature and to each other. The youth engaged in an active process of cultural production from the beginning to the end: They were trained to use single reflex cameras, learned black and white photography techniques, printed their own imagery in the dark room and displayed an exhibition in a Toronto café.”

*Projects often stretched the boundaries of the formal school system, bringing learning into the community or the community into the school.* Partnerships between schools and individuals or organizations in the community helped connect students to life beyond the classroom walls. For instance, Grade 3 students at Joseph H. Kerr School in Snow Lake, Manitoba, were encouraged to learn about their community by selecting members of their town to photograph and interview. The project now has become an annual project at this elementary school. In Dauphin, Manitoba, École Macneill School invited a variety of local and regional artists and entertainers to share their talents with students. Older students worked with a local playwright to write their own play and perform it for fellow students and parents.

A similar project was undertaken at École Saint Arsène in Montreal in which a theatre troupe spent approximately six months with students, introducing them to the creative process in the performing arts. “Les élèves de l’école Saint-Arsène et les membres de la troupe de théâtre Les Bouches décousues ont convenu d’une collaboration innovatrice. En effet, la troupe est en résidence dans cette école depuis octobre 1999 et ce, jusqu’à la mi-mars 2000. Voilà l’occasion pour les élèves d’entrer en contact avec le monde excitant du théâtre. En complicité avec le personnel de l’école, les artistes des Bouches décousues rencontrent les enfants de première année qui sont les témoins actifs des différentes étapes du processus de création.”

Students at St. Mark’s School in Markstay, Ontario, joined with parents, local businesses and their municipal government in an Education Week project expressing the theme ‘making all things new.’ They turned “a gravel strewn, weed-infested courtyard” into a “user/student friendly area – a place where nature studies and observations could be carried out, a place to relax, a place to eat

lunch – a community place.” In addition to being a valuable contribution to their community, the project provided a variety of practical learning opportunities for the students. “Besides enhancing the esthetics of the school, it gave students the opportunity to participate in learning how to apply previously taught classroom skills to tasks of daily life – i.e., mathematics, measurement and geometry as they relate to carpentry, fertilizing, building structures, relating to others around them (as taught in health and guidance) in order to accomplish a common goal in the safest, most cost-efficient manner; studies in plant/agricultural sciences; art – combining colours... .”

Older students also have discovered learning opportunities that connect them to the wider community. Students, faculty and staff at the McMaster University School of Nursing created the McMaster Student Outreach Clinic (McSOC): “During this millennium year, the student volunteers have organized themselves into a roster of teams, each supported by a volunteer faculty member, and one night each week, they participate in an outreach, grassroots service to people who are homeless and living on the streets throughout the Hamilton area.” For students, “learning more about the contributors to poverty and homelessness are important components of the McSOC experience.”

*Many projects tried to encourage learning through the processes of mentoring and modeling. Education took place as much through example as through explanation.* Raging Grannies of Calgary noted in their project, Raging for Social Justice: Modelling Social Action for All Ages, their intent to act as models for the next generation. “We will address classes of high school students, singing our satirical songs and discussing the concept of social action. ... Through our public performances, we will draw attention to issues of concern and we will model social action for all ages.”

The TC! Mentorship Project in Winnipeg provided encouragement, guidance and training to help unemployed individuals secure employment: “It helped connect single parents on social assistance who are pursuing various skills training opportunities with mentors who are currently working in those fields. Mentors provide support and encouragement as well as information on employment and ongoing training opportunities. They may also assist their protégés to network with professional organizations and provide opportunities for workplace tours.”

Despite the interest in mentoring and modelling, an equally important, related message emerged from the analysis. *Learning is not simply a one-way transmission of knowledge or information. Rather, it is a two-way process in which teachers learn and students teach.* The Co-operators-Barnes Insurance and Financial Services Inc. of London, for example, sponsored a mentoring project. These mentors testified to the two-way nature of the learning experience: “Nobody learns more from these young protégés than the mentor. The young never cease to amaze us.”

A variant of the mentoring process is the peer education model which was employed in many projects. The Ambassador Partnership in Toronto, for example, described the importance of the model: "The Ambassador Partnership is a peer education program for street involved and similarly disadvantaged youth. ... Many of the Ambassadors have experienced abuse and have little or no family support. Some have been homeless, have been involved with various substances and have resorted to prostitution and other dangerous activities. They are working toward completing their high school and making healthier choices. They contribute to the community through sharing their personal experiences with youth in elementary schools."

The TRUST program (Teens Respecting and Understanding Situations Together) sponsored by the Atlantic Memorial and Terrance Bay Elementary in Gambo, Newfoundland, also noted the importance of peer education. "The program was designed to address issues of labelling, bias, peer pressure, violence, social development, suicide, alcohol and drug use. It is a means of helping the youth, but also allowing them to help themselves and each other with these issues."

*Young people, in particular, often employed or were encouraged to use new technologies to carry out their projects and to develop new high-tech skills at the same time.* A senior kindergarten class at Convent Glen Elementary School in Ottawa, for example, was involved in the Kidpix Careers of the Future project. "Using KidPix software, the objectives were to make a drawing of what the student will be like in 2020. The software picture was used in a slideshow and incorporated into a webpage, where each child's work is available for viewing by parents, other students and the general public. ... This project is following the curriculum by creating a variety of simple written materials: stories, poems, interactive software for different purposes, in this case, the creation of a webpage."

### ***Leadership Development***

Leadership development was another major theme that emerged from the analysis of the website entries. This theme is consistent with community capacity building.

*Many projects sought to nurture new leaders. Contrary to the notion that leaders are born and not raised, these initiatives provided opportunities for citizens, particularly young people, to acquire and practise the art of leadership.* The Race Relations Office of the Durham District School Board provided such an opportunity for leadership development in its STAR (Students Together Against Racism) program. "STAR is a five-day residential camp program, to be held at

the Ontario Educational Leadership Centre. ... Students chosen have shown exceptional leadership qualities at their individual schools. The focus of the camp is to further develop these skills so that students can carry out action plans created at camp upon their return to school.”

***Leadership skills also were developed through group efforts.*** The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, for example, sought to develop these skills through its project, Direction through Dance. “For young people, participation in art-making stimulates creativity, problem-solving, self-esteem and intellectual growth. The Royal Winnipeg Ballet will give Winnipeg core area at-risk youth the opportunity to develop self-discipline, teamwork, leadership skills and to experience pride of accomplishment by creating a work of dance, by and for themselves, and then performing it.”

***While emerging leaders require support and guidance, they also need opportunities to take responsibility and to experience the challenges this entails.*** This principle was evident in projects such as Leaders for Tomorrow undertaken in West St. Modeste, Newfoundland: “Leaders in the community have held discussions with youth at the high school, and many expressed their frustration at the programming for youth. Through this participatory process, many young people recognized their responsibility in providing solutions. Engagement in civic life is marked by active participation in public affairs, with an emphasis on shared rather than personal interest. ... The result of our project was to give youth the responsibility along with leaders to organize their own youth centre and have their own programs.”

In Victoria, the Saanich Youth Liaison Council and Saanich Community Services sought to create similar leadership development opportunities for youth. Experiential learning in supportive environments enabled emerging leaders to voice their views and take constructive action on matters of concern to them. “Youth will be involved in the planning process and will have an opportunity to express themselves. The Forum will give local agencies and groups a better sense of what youth think today and where they would like to see services in five years. The goal is to help groups and agencies establish youth voices as a key component in their planning for the new millennium.”

***Projects fostering leadership development typically adopted an affirmative, asset-building approach.*** This perspective is evident in Victoria’s above-mentioned Youth Forum 2000 initiative: “The project forum will focus on the ‘assets approach’ to support and empower young people. The goal is to show young people that they are valued by their community as well as give opportunities to contribute to others. It is our belief that the more ‘assets’ young people have the more likely there will be a stronger community base.”

Leadership development is also evident in the ‘0 to ONE’ Canadian Chinese Leadership Training Camp project which described its philosophy as follows: “This gift builds on the notion that everyone is in the possession of potential for being a future leader. ... Our interaction with young people is to confirm our view that the younger generation is full of talent. They are the key to

our future and this program will be a gift to our community, to shape its future. With guidance, affirmation and training, they will flourish and their potential will be realized, so that they will love themselves, their community and their country.”

*In addition to providing a learning experience for the people directly involved in the project, community initiatives recognized that they could set an example for others and thereby foster new local leaders.* This was the case with the Teeny Weeny Treehouse project initiated in Vancouver by SUCCESS (United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society). “Our group is part of a leadership training program from SUCCESS; the group members are about 14-17 years old. We hope that by doing this project we can encourage community unity; improve a place that was previously lacking facilities; leave a lasting mark as a youth group; and become an inspiration for other youths and community members.”

*Other projects involving young people sought to foster voluntarism and the skills of active citizenship.* These projects typically would begin with the setting in which the students already were involved. At Forest Park Elementary School in Nanaimo, British Columbia, for example: “Grade 7 students will take part in a leadership conference where the focus is on community service. ... The 42 Grade 7 students will be joined by their Grade 6 colleagues on Friday afternoon where they can begin to form bonds as leaders in our school and in our community.”

*Leadership development efforts were not, however, directed only at youth. There were opportunities for growth and development for adults as well.* One example of a series of community leadership initiatives was found in Waterloo Region, Ontario: “Leadership Waterloo Region is a unique community leadership training program in this region. The program is designed to develop and nurture emerging community leaders from all sectors to connect them with present leaders. The ultimate end is to develop a network of trained, committed leaders who are ready to tackle the issues this region faces.” Notably, for adults as much as youth, leadership development tends to involve opportunities for experiential learning and mentorship relations.

## ***Making Connections***

Building social capital is largely about creating constructive connections among individuals and groups. The literature on social capital identifies two major types of connections: bonding and bridging relationships. Both types of relationships are represented in the *Our Millennium* projects.

‘Bonding’ social capital seeks to build relationships among people of similar backgrounds or circumstances. *The gift registry contains many instances of efforts to strengthen bonds among members of the same street or neighbourhood.*

The Nelson Millennium Committee, for example, describes its Life on Our Street project as follows: "Life on Our Street is an event which will encourage neighbours to get to know each other. Blocks will be asked to participate by having a potluck supper, neighbourhood barbecue, a street dance, a charity fundraiser. ... By knowing each other better, neighbours can depend on each other for an increased feeling of safety in their homes, and depend on neighbours to watch for unusual activity when they are away. A neighbour will be someone who can be called upon in an emergency. And getting together in this way with neighbours will be fun."

A second type of relationship is known as 'bridging' social capital. In this case, bonds are built across differences. *Many projects sought to bridge the differences in communities.* For example, *some projects tried to build bonds across generations.* Grandpa's and Grandma's Reading Corner in the Prince George Public Library is one such project. "Our gift is a project to bring seniors and young children together in the library. Seniors will be recruited and trained as volunteers to read with preschoolers. Many families in our community live far away from their extended family, so our gift is for both young and old."

*Many projects sought to encourage connections across racial and ethnic groups. The connections were intended explicitly to reduce racism and promote greater multicultural expression and understanding.* A group called ArtStarts from Toronto, for example, developed a Community Totem. "The ArtStarts Community Totem is unparalleled in its celebration of the cultural diversity in the City of York, the most multicultural community in the City of Toronto. A totem is the perfect vehicle for this project because it naturally allows for individual artistic expression to become part of a collective creation and stand as a permanent monument for all to see. ... Community members of all ages and from all walks of life participated, designing clay tiles by embedding their stories, thoughts and expressions into the clay."

The Guelph and District Multicultural Centre described the connections that NO RACISM HERE! sought to achieve: "The purpose of the NO RACISM HERE! project is to deliver education and awareness workshops in area high schools, the university and in public spaces, such as the library, to encourage the community to actively participate in the fight against racism and ethno-cultural discrimination. ... Workshops are highly interactive and are specifically designed to meet the needs of each audience."

*Groups also sought to make connections across faith groups to encourage an understanding of the diverse faiths that comprised the community.* The Hamilton Interfaith Group set up the Interfaith Dialogue for the following purpose: "With over 50 diverse cultures and religions forming the fabric of the Hamilton area, we are indeed a multicultural, multiracial and multifaith community." The Interfaith Dialogue brought together "more than 15 diverse faith communities in Hamilton to promote understanding and cooperation among all groups in our community as we begin the

new millennium. The Interfaith Dialogue presented a number of themes for discussion, focussing on the ways in which various faith communities can work together to create a more accepting, trusting and compassionate community.”

*Some projects attempted to bridge the gap between urban and rural communities.* The Bridging Communities project is one example. “Students from Waverley Memorial-L.C. Skerry School in Halifax had an opportunity to visit the inner-city school and get a look at their environment, how different it was from their own school. Students from the inner-city school got to feel the freedom of wide-open spaces and experience nature at its best on their visit. All students also became aware how alike they were. On one of the visits, one of the quilts made was presented to the inner-city school where it now proudly hangs. Teachers in both schools hope the program will be able to continue.”

The Youth Volunteer Corps of St. John’s, Newfoundland, sponsored a similar project. While its primary goal was “to instill in youth a sense of community responsibility and promote youth volunteerism,” it also built relations among rural and urban communities. Rural youth participated in volunteer projects in the city and urban youth travelled to rural areas to contribute to projects in those communities.

*Several projects helped build connections among ‘old’ and ‘new’ Canadians.* The Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, for example, sponsored a public meeting entitled “Ethnivision’s Youth Forum 2000.” Its purpose was to discuss issues around immigration, multiculturalism, racism and refugee-related perceptions and practices.

Finally, *many different efforts sought to create bonds between Canadians and citizens of other nations.* These projects were designed to reach out to families throughout the world and invite them to Canada. A number of sports-related events were held to encourage athletes from other countries to participate in Canada. These individuals and families were invited to stay with the Canadian hosts. Several outreach projects involved sending young adults to countries such as Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic to participate in community projects. Participants helped build housing, libraries, health centres and recreational areas in those countries.

*In addition to the various connections that were made, it was evident that new technologies are being embraced as a means to facilitate relationships.* Like *Our Millennium* itself, numerous projects made use of websites to share their message with others. Some projects, such as Hamilton-Wentworth’s Connecting the Community sought to facilitate virtual communication itself: “We are providing free website development, accounts and hosting for Hamilton-Wentworth not-for-profit community associations. ... We are committed to Connecting the Community.”

## ***Inclusion***

***Economic pressures and cultural diversity are two of the forces creating strains on social cohesion and challenging communities to ensure that no one is left outside of social life. A number of projects sought to promote the inclusion of young people.***

One such project, Connecting Kids – Exploring Diversity Together, was undertaken in Duncan, British Columbia: “The new millennium holds more opportunities than ever before for children of all ages to get to know others of different cultures, abilities, family backgrounds and other differences. Separately and together, many of us in the Cowichan Valley have been exploring ways of building a more inclusive community in which children are actively involved in welcoming and including each other. We have been developing our own inclusive leadership skills and passing them on to children through cooperative games, creative activities and outdoor adventures.”

***In a complex, rapidly changing society, a little effort can go a long way. A simple expression of welcome, for instance, can set a tone that draws people into community life, counters exclusion and builds cohesion.*** The Alberry Plains Women’s Institute in Prince Edward Island organized a Pot Luck Community Supper for this purpose. “On May 7, 2000, the Women’s Institute branch, with the help of our local 4H Club, organized and held a potluck supper in the Parish Hall. All residents of our community of Alberry Plains were invited with a special invitation to all new homeowners in the district.”

***At times, more focussed efforts are needed to raise awareness about exclusion and remove barriers to inclusion.*** The gift registry included a number of projects of this type. In Sudbury, for example, the Canadian Hearing Society sponsored an event to counter barriers facing people with hearing problems. The Society and its partners hosted an Accessibility Exposition “to raise awareness among businesses and organizations about becoming accessible in the new millennium. ... Solutions to breaking down barriers and improving accessibility will be discussed and groups will have the opportunity for follow-up assistance after the exposition.”

A community group in Georgina, Ontario, removed barriers through ensuring accessible play structures for children. “We are building an All Abilities Playground in our community that will be accessible to all children including those in wheelchairs and with other mobility difficulties. This will be the first playground of its kind in our area.”

In Thunder Bay, the Fort Williams Hurricane Hockey Organization took steps to ensure that all youth could participate in local sports. “For youth unable to pay for the high costs of playing hockey, our organization allows the youth to play without paying by working at a few Bingos. We have also given jerseys to a league devoted to underprivileged children.”

Citizen Advocacy in Greater Victoria set out to overcome the exclusion of persons with developmental disabilities. “This project was developed in response to the social isolation experi-

enced by many high school youth who have developmental disabilities. Nine volunteer students from Oak Bay High School received training from Citizen Advocacy and were then linked with a student in the school who has a disability. The two students meet weekly at lunch, building social connections and friendships.”

***Efforts to counter exclusion also were reflected in long-term efforts to enable full integration among groups that tend to be socially marginalized.*** The Toronto Association for Community Living, for example, set up the Youth 2 Work Project. “In response to the wishes of the families and the people with disabilities that we work with, we developed a new program called The Youth 2 Work Project. Y2W (instead of Y2K) supports youth aged 14-23 with a developmental disability in career planning, work experience and skill development. The families had expressed a need for more individual, more person-centered and more person-directed careers for their children with disabilities, in place of the traditional sheltered-workshop employment. This reflects increased independence of our youth, who have been integrated in programs at school and in the community, and who wanted to continue integration as they proceed to work and careers. Y2W reflects that today, people with disabilities are better educated and have more choices available to them, that they have a better skill base to draw on, and that there are more networks and community contacts which can be used in developing careers.”

***In some communities, ongoing commitments were made to ensure the full participation of groups whose interests are often overlooked.*** This is the mandate of the Youth Mentor position established in the community of Revelstoke, British Columbia. “A Youth Mentor position has been created for our community. The Mentor will support youth to be more involved in issues affecting their interests as well as those of the community as a whole. ... The Mentor will organize visible, positive community activities and relationships where youth will have an opportunity to make a real and recognized contribution. The Mentor will work to establish interaction and communication between youth and seniors. The position will develop and implement programs to educate the community about the importance of valuing youth and the needs of young people. This position will contribute greatly to our community.”

***Outreach initiatives, whether organized on an institutional or personal basis, helped ensure that citizens are connected to their community and the resources and services it provides.*** One example is the McMaster Student Outreach Clinic (McSOC) set up by the McMaster University School of Nursing, earlier described. The Clinic was initiated by a small group of nursing student volunteers who wanted to reach out to help the homeless. McSOC has evolved in the year 2000 into an active and strong network of support involving more than 125 volunteers. “Providing food, clothing, and personal items as well as offering health information and assistance in connecting to medical services, the students and the faculty volunteers have developed strong relationships with the people and community they are serving. Faculty and staff and some of their family members prepare and donate the food, which is distributed. Community partnerships and learning more about the contributors to poverty and homelessness are important components of the McSOC experience.”

A personal initiative in the same vein was sponsored by the Martinez-Simon family of Guelph, Ontario: "I want to visit elderly people who are isolated in their homes or institution and who don't have a family that visits them often. I think it is important for the elderly to feel loved and have something to look forward to when they are isolated from the rest of the world. I also want my children to have as much contact as possible with elderly people because these people have too much to offer. ... The elderly get someone who cares for them and the children learn about history, love, wisdom, and about sharing and providing happiness."

*At times, the connections among individuals were facilitated by a partnership between the organizations in which they participate.* For example, the Oaklands Community Centre and Oaklands School in Victoria set up the Greening Together project. While the focus was environmental improvement, the organizations carried out their work in partnership – in their view, an important method of working. They describe the importance of collaboration: "Oaklands School's Parent Advisory Committee and Greening Committee have teamed up with the Oaklands Community Centre to start a shared garden space. The project aims to provide an opportunity for school youth and centre seniors to work collaboratively. Seniors who don't have access to a garden will be specifically asked to get involved and to help with its upkeep."

In some instances, more far-reaching organizational partnerships may be needed to address the issues that contribute to social exclusion. *Multistakeholder collaboration was evident as an important tool through which some communities addressed complex issues that no one agency could address on its own.*

YACK BACK 2000 in Calgary is a planning process geared to addressing the concerns of street youth and housing: "YACK BACK 2000 is a community consultation conference which will bring together dedicated stakeholders to consolidate a community action plan to address issues of housing and learning for youth."

In Victoria, the CRUNCH project illustrates the importance of social capital for tackling difficult community challenges: "Downtown Victoria has been participating in a quiet revolution called the CRUNCH process. City government, social agencies, community housing advocates, churches and downtown business leaders started talking to each other about the 'crunch' experienced by funding cutbacks. The CRUNCH process encouraged participation from a broad spectrum of our citizens to find creative solutions to issues of community health, housing, food, economic development, safety and resource sharing. Its results have been subtle but important. Participants have discovered important ways to work together in a renewed spirit of cooperation and mutual respect."

A similarly extensive initiative was launched in Calgary to address the issue of domestic violence: "The Justice Working Project is a coordinated community response to the issue of domestic violence in the City of Calgary. This innovative pilot project involves the Calgary Police Serv-

ice, the criminal justice system and over 60 community social service agencies working together toward the common goal of making Calgary's homes free of domestic abuse – safe and secure places for parents and their children. The project, funded by three levels of government and community funders – including the United Way, the Calgary Foundation, private foundations and corporations became reality with the opening of a specialized court and provision of associated services at the end of May 2000. The project provides added support to victims of the crime of domestic violence and treatment of the perpetrators. In this way, we hope to break the cycle of violence and avoid its recurrence.”

## ***Visioning***

***In addition to connecting people, many projects helped create a bridge from the past to the future.*** Living in an era of far-reaching change, and stimulated further by the prospect of the millennium, the future loomed large in the minds of many participants. Communities often grounded themselves in reflections on the past as they prepared to look to the future.

An example of the interplay between past and future was Our Future Cambridge undertaken by the Tait Street School in Cambridge, Ontario. “The project will be a finished piece of textile work. ... Students from JK to Grade 6 will participate. We will envision what Cambridge will look like in 25 years. ... Cambridge was founded on the textiles industry. This is a way for these students to connect to that beginning. They will be using a computer on the knitting machine, incorporating new technologies that are now an integral part of our community.”

***Many groups sought to represent graphically their communities in the transition to a desirable future.*** This was the case, for instance, with the Sooke Quilting Club: “Our group has created an 8 foot by 4 foot quilt to represent what we want Sooke to look like in the next 100 years and to highlight the aspects of our community that we appreciate. A few of the things that Sooke needs are a seniors' residence, a salmon enhancement program and more medical practitioners. We are donating our quilt to an as-yet-to-be determined location.”

***Some groups undertook highly ambitious projects that combined local research, the arts and community participation to educate, animate and unify their communities.*** The Riverdale Lives and Legends initiative in Toronto is one such project.

“The overall goals of Riverdale Lives and Legends include: 1) capture and document stories from long-term residents from diverse communities that have shaped Riverdale over the years through their participation in different community actions; 2) use the stories to develop a community theatre and murals engaging the diverse communities from all ages, ethnic, class and occupational backgrounds in order to celebrate our successes and inform the existing Riverdale residents of the

strengths and challenges of the community; 3) inspire younger generations and build a sense of community pride by involving the local primary, junior and high schools in creating eight permanent murals celebrating Riverdale's past successes and depicting current challenges and strengths; 4) increase awareness about environmental issues by organizing eco-tours, emphasizing how past and present industry has affected our local environment and the role citizens can play in improving air quality; 5) link and promote the role of members of the business community in creating a healthy community."

*Several projects were involved in trying to engage the community in identifying the best route to the future.* A town hall community visioning session, for example, was organized by three partners – Healthy Communities, Tri-Town Foundation and Our Millennium – in New Liskeard, Ontario. "To create a Healthy/Successful Community, we must ask our residents what in the community is important to them? If they were to build the community themselves, what would they include? The Town Hall/Community Visioning Session is an opportunity for the community not only to express their opinions about the future (and current) needs of the community, but also to work together to see those ideas come to pass. It is an opportunity for all members of the community to come together and 'network' and share ideas and resources."

## ***Celebration***

Many efforts focussed upon community capacity building and, indeed, most of the *Our Millennium* projects sought to correct a given problem, redress a recognized imbalance or promote inclusion. *There were many projects, however, concerned not with tackling problems but with celebrating the positive, the commonalities rather than the differences and the achievements as opposed to the unfinished.*

*At times, a celebration is the release a community needs to rejuvenate its energy as it tackles difficult challenges.* First Light festivities in Ramea, Newfoundland, served just this purpose. "The First Light celebration was a morale boost for the citizens of Ramea. It helped make those present feel that all is not gloom and doom and gave a feeling of hope for the future. 'There is light at the end of the tunnel.' "

*Much of the celebration-type activity was organized by groups representing ethnic or visible minorities.* Schools, community organizations and churches carried out projects to foster greater tolerance and awareness of ethnic groups residing in Canada. These projects included music and food festivals, conferences, peace quilts, art exhibits and dance. Several projects produced films and documentaries focussed primarily upon African culture.

The Multicultural Festival 2000 was sponsored by the Penticton and District Multicultural Society. "A variety of ethnic groups participated in an evening of entertainment, food tasting, crafts, customs and art in a cooperative spirit of appreciating one another's heritage."

Le Restaurant Chez Toto in Montreal (which serves Haitian cuisine) organized a festival and directed the proceeds toward rebuilding a literacy centre and other community services destroyed by Hurricane Georges in September 1998.

The Community Organization on Race Relations in London sponsored a celebration entitled A Millennium of Peace Without Racism. It commemorated the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination with "guest speakers, an awards presentation, song and dance." Similarly, the Ajax Race Relations Committee held the Ajax 2000 Multicultural Festival to "celebrate multicultural diversity." There was an ethnic food court as well as local talent including storytellers, entertainers and artists from various cultures.

An Italian festival named Ital-Festival 2000 was organized to promote Italian food, arts, culture and the opera. *L'Organisation des jeunes de Parc-Extension* Youth Organization sponsored an intercultural day (*La Journée Interculturelle*) to get to know various groups' culture through artistic presentations.

### *Lessons From the Ground*

In addition to the cross-cutting themes and their constituent parts, many practical lessons emerged from this analysis of the gift registry. In effect, these can be considered 'lessons from the ground' in that they do not derive from or embody theoretical concepts. Rather, they evolve from the practical experience represented by the gift registry.

When key patterns emerge, it is important to ask what we can learn from the front-line practical work. It is also helpful to speculate as to why these patterns are found. Sometimes a relatively straightforward answer is available – e.g., communities that invested actively in this project through supporting local staff and organizers tended to generate a high degree of activity. In other cases, the findings are more difficult to assess.

One of the unknowns, for example, is whether a project undertaken in respect of the millennium would have proceeded anyway in the absence of the *Our Millennium* national initiative. Sometimes, the answer is readily apparent because the project stated clearly that it was set up as part

of this national project.

In other cases, by contrast, certain events would have gone ahead, regardless of the national project. But the presence of the *Our Millennium* project, along with the associated recognition through the website registry, encouraged some groups to officially register their activity as a millennial project. They may have expected that they would receive some special attention or recognition that would not have been paid to their 'regular' project.

Of course, what is most important at the end of the day is the fact that the project actually was undertaken. The only reason to understand its genesis is to determine the impact of national initiatives, such as *Our Millennium*, upon local communities and groups. In the absence of evaluative data, it is not easy to provide a definitive answer to this question.

### ***National Reach***

It is difficult to assess in an objective way the reach of the *Our Millennium* project – only because there is no parallel or precedent with which to compare it. However, in a subjective way, it is possible to say that the program had extensive national reach – if numbers alone are any indication: 6,558 projects representing 4.6 million Canadians who participated in this initiative. The gifts made in respect of the millennium were varied and diverse, represented a broad scope of activity and were undertaken for a wide range of purposes.

What is particularly noteworthy about the *Our Millennium* project is the broad scope of communities that participated in all parts of the country and in all regions. There was an equally impressive mix of large metropolitan areas, smaller urban regions and rural area/small towns. The program employed a variety of methods to get the word out about the millennium effort and appeared to be effective in communicating its message.

But despite the broad reach of the program, there are some interesting patterns worth noting. First, there appears to be a disproportionate representation of activity (this is not intended as a negative observation) in certain parts of the country, such as Victoria, Hamilton, the Greater Toronto Area and Quebec. There were far fewer projects in the Atlantic Region, the Prairies and the North. The skewing of activity in these directions can be explained partly by the underlying national structure of the community foundations movement in Canada and partly by the resources invested in various regions.

With respect to the first factor, community foundations are independent, autonomous bodies linked by a national membership organization. Members were free to decide whether and how to

participate in the *Our Millennium* initiative. There are well-established local organizations in some parts of the country, such as Hamilton, Calgary and Victoria. It is clear that when local foundations made an explicit decision to become actively involved in *Our Millennium*, they were able to create significant community response.

The Hamilton Community Foundation, for example, struck a partnership with the local Volunteer Centre to jointly execute the *Our Millennium* program. The national office provided some funding to support the process; additional funds were raised in the community to assist the local mobilization efforts.

The style of the local coordinators and the stage of the existing program efforts also appeared to be important factors in encouraging community involvement. Local coordinators had to determine whether to build on efforts already under way or to help launch new projects. In some cases, they found that it was more effective to build on an existing effort with an established base. They could then help develop new projects.

Similarly, the *Our Millennium* national office paid particular attention to generating activity in Quebec to ensure that the project was a truly national effort. An important lesson can be drawn from these findings: It is essential to invest in a community in order to create volunteer activity. Voluntary action does not just happen voluntarily. Extensive voluntary action is the result of a significant investment of resources at the local level. This lesson is especially noteworthy, given that 2001 is the International Year of Volunteers.

Finally, the difficulties in classifying the regional representation of the projects should be noted. As discussed, each submission to the gift registry was entered onto a grid with a number of categories (Appendix A). The grid set out to classify whether projects were from major metropolitan areas, small cities or small towns/rural areas.

But it was often difficult to know how broadly to set the boundaries in terms of classification. Is Richmond, BC, for example, a small city or part of a major metropolitan area? Is Nepean, Ontario, a small city or is it, again, part of the greater metropolitan area of Ottawa?

If the latter classification is used, then the majority of projects would be classified as falling within major metropolitan areas. The categorization may be correct from the perspective of Census Metropolitan Areas employed in national surveys or from the viewpoint of political realities (e.g., municipal integration). But the reality is that most projects were undertaken *by* local communities *for* local communities. A project in Richmond, for example, generally was intended to be local unless it fell under the 'global citizenship' category. In most cases, the decision was made to classify projects by the local or smaller scale rather than 'upscale' the geographic area. This decision reflected the local intent of most of the projects.

## ***Community Champions***

In addition to adequate resources, community champions represent another factor that appeared to bolster volunteer activity. Citizen engagement usually requires a catalyst to promote that engagement.

Local community foundations were encouraged to create projects in celebration of the millennium in their respective regions. There is no question that particularly active community foundations managed to generate substantial activity.

But it was not only community foundations that played a champion role. In some cases, an individual involved in a school network was able to kickstart a wide range of activity – especially in relation to school challenges in which different schools were encouraged to compete against each other (e.g., around environmental issues).

In some very small communities, there probably was a single champion – either individual or family – who encouraged others to participate in the *Our Millennium* initiative. There are examples of many families in a small community that undertook the same project. A champion from that community likely rallied these families to participate in the 'cause.'

## ***Role of Sectors***

The database analysis makes clear the fact that many different sectors participated in the *Our Millennium* project. These included voluntary groups and organizations, schools and churches. Municipalities also were involved in projects but could not be considered frequent sponsors.

Churches were actively engaged in this national project – and relatively heavily in the global citizenship category. It is possible that the awareness of church groups with respect to international projects has been raised by the recent activities of the church movement, known as 'Jubilee.' The movement has been lobbying the Finance Minister and politicians more generally about the need to forgive the debt of developing countries.

Overall, there was little private sector involvement. The notable exception was the role played in the *Our Millennium* project by The Co-operators. The company acted as national sponsor of the project and embraced the program throughout the country. Staff from all regions registered 106 projects, mainly in the Safety and Crime Prevention category, which the company effectively sponsored. The *Our Millennium* "Catalogue of Possibilities" was made available to the public in

more than 700 local offices. The sponsorship also helped underwrite part of the national advertising campaign and the company itself did lots of direct promotion with its customers.

Aside from this active involvement, individual businesses organized only a handful of projects. Private sector involvement typically took the form of sponsorship and donation of equipment or team uniforms for sports events.

It also appeared that, in most cases, independently owned local businesses responded to requests made by community organizations. While these businesses reacted positively, they did not usually take the initiative on their own.

It should be noted as well that while a diverse range of sectors was involved in this work, there were substantial numbers of informal groups (e.g., friends, co-workers) that made contributions to the *Our Millennium* project. This finding is important for several reasons. It confirms that citizens can become involved in civic action even if they are not necessarily members of a formal organization which promotes this activity. Second, contributions by the 'unaffiliated' likely mean that the contributions are new; these probably would not have been made in the absence of the *Our Millennium* project.

### ***Number of Participants***

It already was noted that this database analysis was not intended to represent an evaluation of the *Our Millennium* project. But in seeking the overall themes and key lessons from the ground, it is worth highlighting several practical issues related to the implementation of the project.

It is difficult to determine with any precision the numbers of participants involved in some projects. In registering their project on the *Our Millennium* website, respondents were asked to indicate the number of participants. The concept of 'participant' likely was subject to wide interpretation across the country.

A distinction was made both on the website registry and on the analysis grid developed by the Caledon Institute between the number of organizers and the number of participants. The latter typically was higher than the former. And rightly so.

But herein lies the problem: how best to count the number of participants in any given effort. Are they participants simply by virtue of their status relative to the sponsoring organization (e.g., students in a school; residents of a town; members of a group)? A town in Quebec that was organizing a celebration, for example, identified 30,000 'participants' in its website entry. It is possible that

this number of participants actually was involved. But it is more likely that the entry referred to the number of potential participants in the event – not to the precise number that actively participated.

A similar problem was evident in submissions like the one from Sir Robert Borden High School in Nepean, Ontario. For its millennial gift, the student body sponsored a foster child in a developing country. In this case, the student council members were the true 'participants' in terms of making the decision and subsequent administrative arrangements. Yet the number of participants posted in the registry description indicates that the entire student body participated – which effectively is correct. The funds for the foster child's monthly payment are raised through school events. There is a picture in the lobby of the school for all the students to see 'their child.' Perhaps most important, all the students can take pride in this collective effort. They all learned about the role that individuals can play in making a difference in the world. This is a crucial lesson – and indeed a priceless gift that the *Our Millennium* program has left to Canadians.

Another problem arose from the fact that, in some cases, the same effort was entered several times on the registry as a separate project. For example, 15 families in Quebec sponsored a foster child. Each family is listed as a separate entry. This information could have been counted as one project with 15 (or 30) participants. It is possible that families were eager to have their names listed on the registry and their effort recorded in perpetuity in the National Archives. The attractiveness of this public recognition should not be underestimated. Alternatively, the numerous entries simply may represent the fact that the champion of the project in this community understood that method as the way to make proper website entries.

There is another important factor related to the recognition issue. Some projects (although very few in number) appeared to be interested in the publicity that they thought a national website registry might generate. They did not really undertake anything exceptional in respect of the millennium. It is difficult to 'weed out' this kind of participation when all the contributions to the national project were self-directed and self-monitored. The *Our Millennium* project would have had to screen them out after the fact and then make an explicit decision to remove them from the website. Such screening would have been neither a practical nor appropriate use of resources – especially in light of the miniscule number of projects that appear questionable.

### ***Practical Activities***

In assessing the wide range of activities undertaken by Canadians, what became strikingly clear was the practical simplicity of many of the projects. They were 'hands-on' and involved a concrete activity, such as painting murals, quilting or planting trees. Many projects also involved telling stories through photos or collections of pictures or poems.

Most heritage projects, in particular, focussed upon documenting and/or celebrating the history of the local community. Various methods were used to achieve this goal, including the gathering of local stories and the preparation of 'time capsules' for burial and retrieval at some later date. Other projects sought to restore historic buildings and historical sites, such as memorial statues and a pioneer cemetery. Several initiatives focussed upon the historical recollection of the past through gathering stories, poems, artwork and artifacts. In some cases, participants gave expression to the heritage challenge by organizing family reunions to celebrate their own history.

Several projects involved 'gatherings' or marches to help raise awareness about women and violence or poverty. These events were intended to promote solidarity around issues of national and international concern.

Many elementary and secondary schools raised funds to support educational initiatives in African countries in particular. Examples include the purchase of school supplies, computer program and literacy kits. It is of interest that this option had been described in the *Our Millennium* "Catalogue of Possibilities" sent out to communities to promote the national effort. It likely played a key role in informing Canadians about this important type of contribution.

A number of projects set out to establish community funds to raise money for a range of causes related to low-income individuals, children and youth as well as arts, recreation and heritage. In some cases, these projects were spearheaded by small towns that did not have a formal community foundation in place. In other cases, the projects were undertaken by existing community foundations and involved the creation of a new fund in respect of the millennium. For example, the Edmonton Community Foundation, in partnership with the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region and the *Edmonton Journal*, raised more than \$4 million for a new Our Children's Millennium Fund. The money will be used in support of early childhood development.

These practical activities embody a significant lesson from the ground. It is possible that the most effective way to animate communities is to animate people – literally – by doing something very specific, rather than by holding general meetings or discussions.

### ***Arts and Culture***

Another observation relates to the practical, hands-on theme described above but also is linked closely to the arts and culture category. If there is a single theme that stands out as noteworthy, it is the fact that a disproportionately large number of projects employed various forms of arts and culture – not just those listed in the arts and culture formal category.

This is an important finding in that it speaks to the methods that Canadians feel are effective ways to reach people. Arts and culture often are viewed as the purview of the elite or of privileged citizens who can afford to engage in these activities. However, the *Our Millennium* projects showed just how very important were the arts and cultural activities in working with youth, seniors, members of visible minority groups – with virtually all Canadians.

### *Strengthening the Social Fabric*

It is not possible to know from the information posted on the website registry the effectiveness and impact of these projects, either individually or collectively. Contributors were not asked to provide any evaluative data on the quality of the work. Neither did the *Our Millennium* project have the resources to assess the projects or do *a priori* screening that would accept only those projects considered to have made a major difference in the community.

The assumption underlying the national program was that all these activities made a difference. The long-lasting impact of these myriad efforts is unknown. But the projects, both alone and together, convey an important message: The donation of money, while essential, is only one way to make a meaningful gift. Every person, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, region or ability, is in a position to give something to the community and to take some kind of action or small step in respect of the common good.

The contribution of financial capital may be limited to the wealthy. ***But the creation of social capital is within the power of each and every citizen.***

It is noteworthy that one of the most frequent gifts found in the website registry is the quilt. More than 100 groups throughout the country were involved in creating a special quilt to mark the millennium.

In Cannington, Ontario, a senior kindergarten class took up the quilting tradition of their mothers and grandmothers. The creation they called 'Holding Hands Together' consisted of the hand print and name of each child and served to "remind the youngsters to help and care about each other" as they grew together in the new millennium.

In Victoria, British Columbia, a quilt made by immigrant and refugee women represented "unity, friendship between communities and peace." The women hoped to use the quilt to share with others the values it portrayed and their experiences as newcomers to Canada.

Foothills Elementary School in Prince George, British Columbia, created two quilts, each fostering an awareness of the students' cultural diversity as citizens of Canada and the world.

In Crossfield, Alberta, town residents, seniors, children with special needs and community service clubs combined forces to turn old blue jeans into quilts which were donated to 'children in crisis.' A 'win-win' project, the quilts brought benefits to participants and recipients alike.

In Hamilton, the Erskine's Mom's Group, a social and play group for mothers and their children, created a "collective quilt that celebrates and represents our sense of parenthood, community, family, connectedness, spiritual values and mutual support."

Artists, volunteers and quilters in Pickering, Ontario, made a quilt depicting the town's historical buildings. Grade 2 students at St. Timothy School in Hamilton envisioned their dreams for the new millennium, which they depicted in a quilt that now hangs in the school library.

Many of the qualities found in other gifts are embodied in the gift of quilts and quilting. It may be an apt metaphor for the registry overall.

The quilt theme, so representative of the *Our Millennium* work, draws upon what people know from the past. But it is this collection of past experiences that weave together the direction for the future.

The quilt gifts are tangible. They embody both individual contribution and collective effort. Quilts encourage not only creative expression but also the substantive expression of values, memories, identities and dreams. They are explicit as well as symbolic – i.e., they can represent a message at different levels of interpretation.

Finally, quilts are the concrete embodiment of a collective effort. They show the value of many hands working together. The individual pieces, when viewed as a whole, create new value. Similarly, the projects undertaken in respect of *Our Millennium* – an ambitious and highly imaginative national project – create new value through strengthening Canada's social fabric.

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***Appendix A:  
Grid Categories***

The gift registry website was analyzed by reviewing each of the 11 theme areas set out in the *Our Millennium* "Catalogue of Possibilities." Each project was entered onto a grid that set out a wide range of categories, listed below.

***Key Theme/Subject***

***Brief Descriptor***

Youth and Children  
Arts and Culture  
Environment  
Heritage  
Connections  
Recreation  
Learning  
Safety and Crime Prevention  
Care and Support  
Global Citizenship  
Other

***Sub-themes***

Ethnicity  
Immigration

***Overarching Themes***

Celebration  
Future

***Geographic Location***

Province  
Region (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, British Columbia, North)

***Community Type***

Metropolitan Centre  
Small City/Town  
Rural Area

***Number of Organizers***

***Number of Participants***

***Sponsor***

School/School Group

- Elementary
- Secondary
- Postsecondary

Service Club

Social Club

Business/Business Association

Union

Church/Church Group

Informal Group

Women's Organization

Men's Organization

Youth Group

Ethnic Group

Sports/Recreation

Heritage Group

Environmental Group

***Participants***

Gender

Age

- Children (14 and under)
- Youth (15 to 24)
- Adults (25 to 55)
- Seniors (55 and up)

***'Recipients'/Target***

Local Community  
National Community  
International Community  
General Public  
Children  
Seniors  
Persons with Disabilities  
New Canadians  
Ethnic Group

***Time Frame of Project***

Day  
Week  
Month  
Year  
One-time event  
Recurring  
Enduring

***Medium/Format***

Event  
Service  
Donation

- Money
- Labour
- Materials

Publication  
Artistic Production  
Construction/Renovation  
Environmental Restoration/Preservation/Beautification

