

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS):
Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric

by

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Abstract

The Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) program is a provincial/municipal partnership that serves over 99% of Alberta's population through a network of community and regional programs (FCSSAA, 2013). This network of community programs and services connects Albertans, their families and their communities through a series of relationships that exist among citizens, volunteers and voluntary organizations, and government staff and elected officials in a manner akin to pieces of fabric connected to make a quilt. The quilt is a metaphor to describe *social fabric* – a term that, from time to time, has been used to explain the complex relationships and connections among people, organizations and communities. This project uses the theoretical framework of social capital to explain characteristics that may be commonly accepted as *social fabric* – in particular, the dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank. In video format, I use the characteristics of social capital and FCSS examples to examine the past and current influence that Family and Community Support Services has on Alberta's social fabric.

Keywords: social capital, community development, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), trust, social cohesion, inclusion, collective action, cooperation, groups, networks, information and communication

Project Objectives

In 2005 the FCSS Association of Alberta (FCSSAA) marked Alberta's centennial through its annual conference theme, *Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric*. FCSS programs from across Alberta were invited to engage community members and volunteers to create quilts and other fibre arts to honour the centennial. In a news release from the City of Calgary, Alderman Joe Ceci – the FCSSAA Board Chairperson at the time – indicated, "the building blocks of a successful social infrastructure are its people, the contributions they make to their community, and partnerships at all levels" (2005). The concept of a social fabric, the images of quilts and fibre arts, and the reference to elements of a social infrastructure serve as inspiration for this project.

As a result, this project is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify a theoretical framework and characteristics for *social fabric*
2. To highlight ways in which Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) has influenced (or not) these characteristics in Alberta, and
3. To produce an informative video documentary for FCSS practitioners and stakeholders that connects the characteristics of a strong social fabric to the work of FCSS in Alberta.

Purpose of the Companion Document

The video documentary, *FCSS: Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric* is meant to stand on its own as an informative examination of Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) in Alberta within the theoretical framework of social capital – an academic proxy for the concept of *social fabric*. The companion document has been produced to accompany the video and provide further information on the theories, concepts, methodologies and results. This document also

serves as the video transcript, appearing in the light green text boxes. References and resources are noted in the back of the companion document.

Introduction

Under the leadership of Premier Ernest Manning and Alberta's Social Credit government, the Preventive Social Services (PSS) Act was passed on July 1, 1966 (Reichwein, 2003, p.23). The program was originally conceived as a provincial/municipal partnership program and attracted thirteen (13) communities in its first year of operation (Finlay & Cowley, 1973). The PSS program endured the shift in Alberta's political environment from Social Credit to Progressive Conservative rule in 1971 despite, and possibly in light of numerous studies and reviews commissioned by government. According to Leslie Bella, author of a landmark research project on PSS in 1978, "this preventive program (PSS) was one of the few innovative social programs to survive into the more fiscally restricted seventies ... as a result of these studies the program has been expanded and retitled Alberta Family and Community Support Services" (1982, p.144).

For almost 50 years, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) have provided preventive social services for Albertans with particular attention paid to the needs of local citizens. "In very broad terms the program is designed to facilitate cooperation, joint planning and funding among the provincial government, municipal governments, public, private, and commercial agencies, and consumer groups in the development of a wide range of programs oriented toward individuals and families" (Finlay & Cowley, 1973, p.19). This early account of the Preventive Social Services program identifies an extensive list of stakeholders engaged in the design and delivery of programs and services.

The Government of Alberta outlines that FCSS programs "must be of a preventive nature

that enhances well-being of individuals and families through promotion or intervention strategies provided at the earliest opportunity” (Province of Alberta, 1994, p.2). The program outcomes seek to influence changes for individuals, families and communities. Hamilton (2008) describes this interconnectedness between individuals at the micro level, through families and communities at more macro levels, as the nested holarchy of city systems being:

Massively interconnected and both inter- and intra-dependent on the system of friends, work, health, school and community, who are likewise multiply dependent on the social systems of city, state and nation, who are multiply dependent on the cultural norms...
(p.55)

In this regard, individuals, families and communities act as significant factors in the systems that influence Alberta's social fabric.

Individuals don't emerge out of thin air. Nor do they prosper disconnected from other human beings. All of us come from some kind of family, and all of our families had patterns of thinking, of human relations, of beliefs and values, and of physical survival that shaped us. (Bopp & Bopp, 2011, p.28)

Donella Meadows (2009), in her book, *Thinking in Systems* suggests that a key strategy in working within complex systems ripe with interdependence, interconnectedness and ever changing conditions is to see things from multiple perspectives – to understand the different parts, to see the connections between parts, to ask questions about our preferred future, and to be creative and courageous about redesigning the systems; “each way of seeing allows our knowledge of the wondrous world in which we live to become a little more complete” (p.6). As FCSS works within and among individuals, families and communities in Alberta, the professionals in the sector tend to have diverse perspectives fueled by significant and meaningful

contact with individuals and community systems. The many and varied groups and networks that include, and are often created by FCSS, are a reflection of the provincial mandate for FCSS – to be a catalyst or connector working at the local level.

For the purposes of this project, the concept of social capital is used as a foundation to describe *social fabric* – a term that appears frequently in municipal descriptions of FCSS, yet does not appear to have a firm theoretical basis. Consider the following uses:

- “The Family & Community Support Services (FCSS) program has a significant impact on the social fabric of Lethbridge and the quality of life of its citizens” (City of Lethbridge, 2013)
- The Town of Canmore, Alberta uses the term *social fabric* in their 2011 FCSS Business Plan as a principle. In this case, *social fabric* is described as “improving public awareness, engagement, and participation in social wellness initiatives” (Town of Canmore, 2011, p.3).
- In a report to St. Albert city council, the Community Services Advisory Board recommended 2011 FCSS funding citing a link to the City’s social corporate objective wherein “plans and initiatives are delivered to strengthen St. Albert’s social fabric” (City of St. Albert, 2011, p.2).

Putnam is cited in many journals, articles and reviews by authors exploring the concepts and theories of social capital, as his earlier works date back to the 1970s in Italy (Putnam, 2000). Seeing differences in the effectiveness of new regional government systems implemented in Italy, Putnam began to recognize the importance of civic engagement, trust and social networks (Putnam, 2000, p.345). There appears to be a general acceptance of this term within FCSS programs. Literature related to social capital appears to have the most significant connection to

the implied uses and understanding of *social fabric*. “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p.19).

Prior to Putnam’s work on social capital, Jane Jacobs had begun to articulate the relationships between physical urban spaces and the impact on the people living within them. Speaking about the role of public sidewalks, Jacobs notes:

The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level – most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone – is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighbourhood need. (1961, p.56)

Putnam credits Jacobs as “one of the inventors” (2000, p.308) of the term social capital as a result of her observations and writing. In her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs (1961) focuses primarily on the role of land-use planning, and city and neighbourhood design. This focus extends the reach of urban physical environments to other aspects of urban life including safety, economics, social engagement, and renewal.

Deeper exploration of the literature on social capital confirms some key themes, which led to the discovery of a comprehensive framework. The World Bank, through the Social Capital Initiative started in 1996, identifies five dimensions of social capital to include:

- Trust
- Social Cohesion and Inclusion
- Groups and Networks
- Collective Action and Cooperation

- Information and Communication (2013, n.p.).

A series of 24 working papers are referenced by The World Bank to spark discussion about social capital – including works by Christiaan Grootaert, and help to inform the broad concepts used as the foundation for this project. These five dimensions provide an outline for the exploration of the *social fabric* concept, and are consistent with other literature on social capital. Throughout this project, the World Bank framework will advance the discussion, and literature from Putnam and others will provide theoretical context for the findings.

The video introduction provides the viewer with information about FCSS and the manner in which it supports individuals, families and communities. Further, this segment introduces the motivation for the video and the reference to the World Bank's five dimensions of social capital.

Introduction:

(Cameron)

In 2005, the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta hosted its annual conference in Calgary - the conference theme was FCSS: Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric. FCSS programs from across Alberta were invited to create a piece of fabric art for display at the conference – the image stuck with me and I'm reminded of this phrase every day as I pass by the fabric art created by our own FCSS.

In the years since, we have used the phrase 'social fabric' as if it's something that we've all agreed to – yet there doesn't appear to be any definition of the concept or any theoretical basis. That's fine...unless you are trying to explain the concept to an academic!

This video is my final project at Royal Roads University to complete my Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies. Its purpose is twofold:

- to use a research-based framework to explain and identify characteristics of a strong social fabric, and
- to demonstrate ways in which FCSS has influenced these characteristics of social fabric in Alberta,

(Narrator)

Family and Community Support Services are also known as FCSS. This provincial/municipal partnership has been delivering preventive social services in Alberta since 1966. Programs are

delivered locally, with each municipality determining the structure that best meets their needs – some FCSS programs are local government departments, others are community-based organizations contracted by the municipality, and others are regional in nature, serving more than one community through the same program.

Regardless of the local structure, all FCSS programs must meet outcomes identified in the province's FCSS Regulation. FCSS programs provide supports for individuals, including: children; youth; adults or seniors; families; and communities.

(Cameron)

I've taken a systems approach to this research – and the most basic of systems originates with individuals...who form families...who build neighbourhoods and communities.

As a system then, everything is connected to everything else – not unlike the game “six degrees to Kevin Bacon!” Another way to think of these interconnected systems is to imagine a quilt. The individual pieces of a quilt are the individuals in our communities. To make a quilt, these pieces need to be connected to other pieces – our families. When individuals and families come together, we begin to see distinct patterns emerge – like in community.

I chose the quilt as a metaphor to help in our understanding of ‘social fabric’ – but ‘social fabric’ isn't the theoretical framework. For me, the most compelling connection between ‘social fabric’ and any theoretical framework is social capital.

(Narrator)

Authors such as Robert Putman and Jane Jacobs have contributed significantly to the literature on social capital in our modern society. The research and experience of the World Bank builds on the work of authors like Putnam and Jacobs, providing a framework for social capital that includes five different dimensions – **trust; social cohesion and inclusion; groups and networks; collective action and cooperation; and information and communication.**

(Cameron)

This project explores the influence that FCSS has had on Alberta's social capital. To do this, I use examples from FCSS programs across Alberta to explore those five dimensions of social capital identified by the World Bank.

Until now, I would suggest that FCSS, as a whole, has not done a very good job of looking at the overall quilt – we focus our evaluations and reports on the impacts that FCSS has at the local level. The examples in this video will begin to show how FCSS has influenced social capital in Alberta on a larger scale.

Methodology

This research project used two different methods of data collection and information gathering. The first was an online survey, administered through the FCSS Association of Alberta (FCSSAA), to individuals listed as *FCSS Directors* according to the FCSSAA membership list (Appendix A). This list ensured that all 206 FCSS Programs in Alberta had the opportunity to participate (FCSSAA, 2012). The survey (Appendix B) asked FCSS practitioners a series of questions based on the concepts found in the World Bank's dimensions of social capital. These closed-ended (quantitative) questions were subsequently followed by an open-ended, qualitative question wherein online participants were asked to cite examples from their community to describe the influence that FCSS had on their prior responses. Finally, survey participants were asked to provide basic community and program data, and contact information if they wished to participate further in the project through an interview process.

Information from the surveys was used to determine the extent to which FCSS programs were aligned with the World Bank dimensions of social capital, to gather information from FCSS practitioners about examples that align, or not, with the dimensions of social capital, and to generate a list of potential project participants for the second phase of the data collection process. Where strong themes and agreement emerged from the surveys, community examples were selected for inclusion in the video based on the following criteria:

1. Ability to clearly convey the influence that their FCSS program had on a particular characteristic of 'social fabric',
2. Availability and accessibility for video interview,
3. Geographic and community size to accurately reflect a broad cross-section of FCSS programs in Alberta

Where availability and accessibility was a limiting factor, the option existed for a telephone interview. Fortunately, weather and timing cooperated making it possible to conduct each of the interviews in person, and these video interviews represent the second method of data collection. Seven of the eleven interviews were conducted in the local communities of the project participants – the remaining four interviews were possible due to the collaborative work and networks between local programs that brought the project participants together.

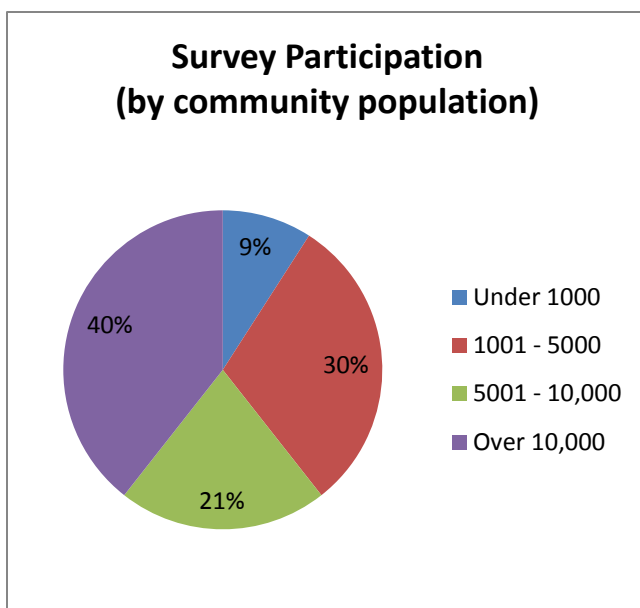


Figure 1 – Survey participation by community population

A total of 206 FCSS programs in Alberta received the invitation to participate in the online survey. Links to the online survey were sent by email through the FCSS Association of Alberta on June 18, 2013. A total of 34 online surveys were received. Throughout this project, quantitative and qualitative results from the online survey will be referenced as *Online Participant* as survey participants were promised

anonymity. Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses by community population.

While the online survey results represent perspectives from 15% of the FCSS programs in Alberta, it is not deemed to be statistically significant. The demographic data collected through the survey does, however, suggest that the information is representative of FCSS programs in Alberta relative to size and geographic distributions. Figure 2 shows the distribution of online survey responses based on the eight regions defined by the FCSS Association of Alberta.

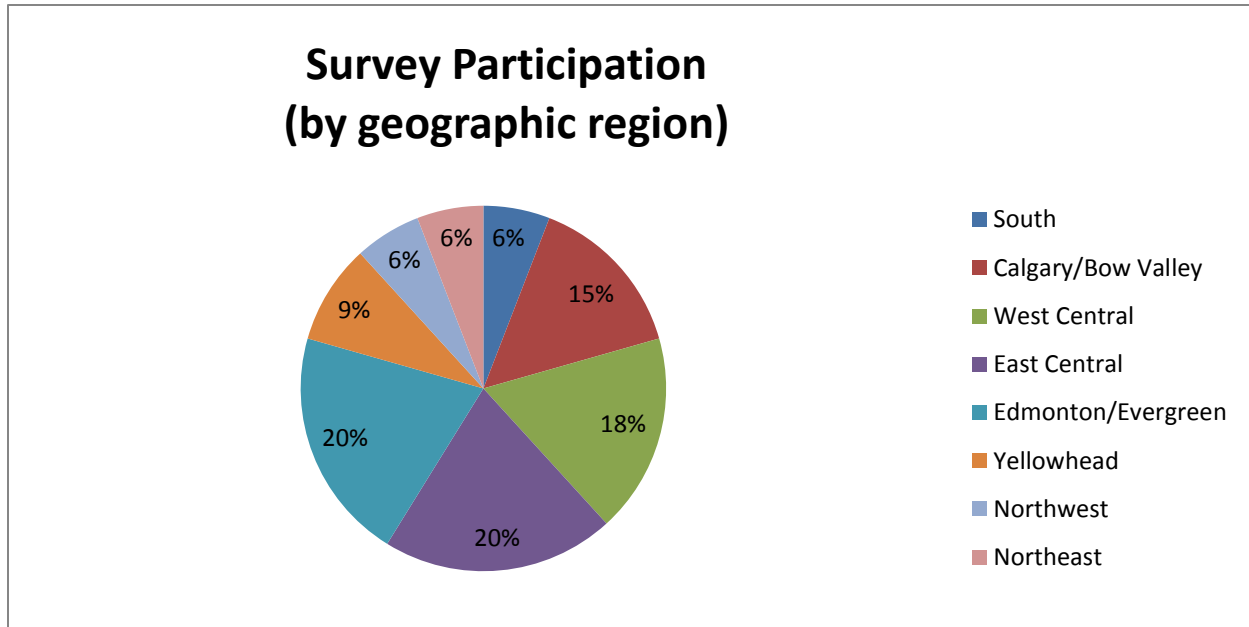


Figure 2 - Survey participation by geographic region

As discussed earlier, eleven video interviews were conducted to provide a deeper understanding of the five dimensions of social capital based on qualitative information gathered through the online survey. The following chart (Figure 3) illustrates the number of interviews conducted in each region and the size of communities:

Region	Under 1000	1001 - 5000	5001 – 10,000	Over 10,000
1 – Northwest		2		1
2 – Northeast				
3 – Yellowhead			1	
4 – Edmonton/Evergreen				1
5 – East Central		1		
6 – West Central		1	1	1
7 – Calgary/Bow Valley		1		
8 – South				1

Figure 3 - Geographic location and population of interviewees

Each of the interviewees will be identified by name in this report and on the video, with the exception of one. Due to the nature of the interview content, that interviewee will not be identified to protect the identity of the individual referred to in the story. At the conclusion of

each interview, the videos were transcribed to form a written account of the process. These transcripts were then used to provide evidence for the broader script developed to guide the assembly and editing of the video documentary.

Online participants were notified that their responses would be aggregated and that specific comments drawn from the surveys would be anonymous. Individuals that agreed to participate in the video interviews provided further consent (Appendix C) for the use of their image, name and FCSS program to be identified in the final project. Supplementary images were collected to support the video production. Individuals that are specifically identified in photos and videos have provided consent (Appendix D) using an online form. In situations where photos and videos were focused on people participating in activities in public spaces, verbal consent was granted before the images were captured.

Statistical Findings

The online survey generated 34 completed responses; one survey did not appear to be completed according to the online tool used. Figure 4 represents the overall responses to the questions formatted to align with the order that each dimension of social capital is presented in this report:

A. Trust	A lot	Some	Not sure	Not much	Very little	Total Responses
1. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by enhancing trust in your community or between communities?	23 (68%)	10 (29%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34
<i>32 qualitative response(s) were provided to this question.</i>						

B. Social Cohesion and Inclusion	A lot	Some	Not sure	Not much	Very little	Total Responses
2. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by supporting people with SIMILAR interests and backgrounds to connect in your community or between communities?	24 (71%)	10 (29%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34
3. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by supporting people with DIFFERENT interests and backgrounds to connect in your community or between communities?	12 (35%)	20 (59%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	34
<i>30 qualitative response(s) were provided to this question.</i>						
C. Groups and Networks	A lot	Some	Not sure	Not much	Very little	Total Responses
4. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by supporting groups and networks in your community or between communities?	28 (82%)	6 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34
<i>32 qualitative response(s) were provided to this question.</i>						
D. Collective Action and Cooperation	A lot	Some	Not sure	Not much	Very little	Total Responses
5. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by bringing people together to cooperate and take action IN YOUR COMMUNITY?	26 (76%)	7 (21%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34
<i>32 qualitative response(s) were provided to this question.</i>						

E. Information and Communication	A lot	Some	Not sure	Not much	Very little	Total Responses
6. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by contributing to good information sharing in your community or between communities?	27 (79%)	6 (18%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34
<i>31 qualitative response(s) were provided to this question.</i>						

Figure 4 - Quantitative results - Online survey

In addition to the quantitative information gathered in the online survey and the corresponding qualitative responses, two additional qualitative questions were asked:

1. Please use this space to describe ways in which FCSS **builds** social capital in your community or between communities.
2. Please use this space to describe ways in which FCSS might **improve** its ability to build social capital in your community or between communities.

These questions resulted in 17 and 23 qualitative responses respectively and contributed to the overall findings from the online survey.

Methodology:

(Cameron)

FCSS programs are found in virtually every community in Alberta, so it was important to me that everyone had equal opportunity to participate in this project. I sent surveys out to every FCSS program and, based on the responses, identified a number of interviewees.

Throughout the summer and early fall, I hit the open road to meet with many of the project participants in their home communities. I conducted eleven video interviews. Project participants represent a broad range of populations and geography – from small towns to larger urban centres, and from across Alberta.

I would like to present the findings from these interviews and experiences. Let’s begin this exploration with **Trust**.

Trust

World Bank Implementation Framework (2011)

Trust and Solidarity

These informal and subjective elements of interpersonal behavior shape people's thoughts and attitudes about interacting with others. When individuals in communities trust each other and the institutions that operate among them, they can easier reach agreements and conduct transactions.

“Trust is essential to understanding social capital and relates to the “cognitive” side of social capital” (Baum & Ziersch, 2003, p.321). The World Bank indicates that “cognitive social capital refers to shared norms, values, trust, attitudes, and beliefs” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.5). The literature consistently describes three aspects of trust that are critical in social capital – thin trust, the general trust that people have for strangers; thick trust, the trust that exists between people known to one another, and trust that exists between people and institutions or government.

Thin trust (Putnam, 2000) is the bond that exists between people as a result of a casual meeting or connections in the early stages of a relationship. The trust is founded on basic norms and social agreement that exists within the culture. “Thin trust is even more useful than thick trust, because it extends the radius of trust beyond the roster of people whom we can know personally” (Putnam, 2001, p.136).

Other things being equal, people who trust their fellow citizens volunteer more often, contribute more to charity, participate more often in politics and community organizations, serve more readily on juries, give blood more frequently, comply more fully with their tax obligations, are more tolerant of minority views, and display many other forms of civic virtue. (Putnam, 2001, p.137)

International development funded by the World Bank pays attention to both structural and cognitive social capital; “to try to measure the cognitive dimension of social capital, they construct a neighborhood trust index” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.9). An example of this proxy is found in the measures of social capital from Glasgow, Scotland – “trust in people who are not like you” is a question that appears on their assessment structure (FMR Research, 2006, p.7). This question serves as a way in which to test trust among people presumed to be different from, or not a member of one’s immediate circle of friends or family.

While FCSS is not in a position financially to test levels of trust in a manner described above, the project participants provided a number of examples to demonstrate that, at least anecdotally, local FCSS programs contribute to development of trust in their communities and among their networks. In smaller communities where FCSS is one of the few, or only human service organizations in town, citizens get to know their FCSS people really well; FCSS personnel are typically the first to hear about stories and situations causing concerns for people. A theme among FCSS Directors is captured in this survey comment, “We support individuals through relationship building, meeting people where they are at, by being respectful, sensitive to each person and their needs” (Online Participant, 2013). Respect, integrity and the suspension of judgement were common among the responses and sentiments of FCSS directors in building trust with community members.

The project participants that commented on trust in the final video documentary agreed, people will often approach FCSS and “test the waters”. Community members seeking supports for the first time will divulge some information to determine the extent to which it is safe to open up. When citizens come to understand that FCSS staff can maintain confidentiality and provide appropriate and effective referrals, people move from thin trust to a thicker or more lasting trust.

“A central element of cognitive social capital is interpersonal trust” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.12). The foundation of trust as an element of social capital rests on the ability to have faith in the word of family and friends – people with whom one has personal contact and relations. “Trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks is sometimes called *thick trust*” (Putnam, 2001, p.136). This type of trust is reinforced when people are living in tight-knit communities characterized by frequent meetings and contact with one another. The reputation that one has in this kind of community is certainly valued and therefore trust is maintained by mutual respect for one another. “In that sense, honesty is encouraged by dense social networks” (Putnam, 2001, p.136).

Thick trust emerges between individuals, families and FCSS “in the way of FCSS being consistent, available and approachable and professional” (Project participant, 2013). While it is important for FCSS to build strong and trusted relationships with people in the community, it was also clear that FCSS seeks to empower citizens to build and maintain thick trust among one another. In many different relationship-building programs offered by FCSS, the primary outcome is to “help people to develop interpersonal and group skills which enhance constructive relationships among people” (Province of Alberta, 1994, p.2). According to one of the online participants, “one of the things that is important to FCSS is to empower people and to help them build those relationships amongst themselves and not necessarily just between us and them” (2013). Examples of FCSS programs designed to build and support relationships among people include mentoring programs, supports for new Canadians, family and school wellness programs, parent education programs, outreach, and short-term, solution-focused counselling (Red Deer & District Family and Community Support Services, 2012, p.4-11).

Where a community is dominated by a few people with “thick trust” – the views may be narrow and people outside the dominant group may tend to retreat and disengage. According to Anderson (2010), a study of rural communities in America’s Great Plains region revealed that when trust is too thick between just a few, others feel they become too powerful; according to one respondent, “Same old people – because of “them” many don’t volunteer” (p.369). The narrow views of some, especially long-time residents of a community, can pose challenges for FCSS staff:

I guess the biggest stumbling block for me, as an FCSS director and being someone that is trying to promote preventive social services, [are] people having an understanding that all people bring value to the table, and to get rid of those preconceived notions, those judgements and for the community to appreciate everyone and what they have to offer. It’s pretty difficult. (Interview with R. Stewart, 2013)

The third dimension of trust is the extent to which people have faith in government and institutions. Alberta Human Services acknowledges the importance of trust citing, “higher quality services and supports lead to greater trust and credibility between the people who access services and the service providers” (Alberta Government, 2013, p.12). Internationally, this belief was found to be true in a 1997 health services study in Brazil “where trust between government agents and intended beneficiaries was the key to success” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.14). Putnam (2001) articulates that a difference exists between trust in government and social trust, wherein this third dimension may be a factor in or a result of social trust, but that social trust is broader and more encompassing.

For better or worse, we rely increasingly – we are forced to rely increasingly – on formal institutions, and above all on the law, to accomplish what we used to accomplish through

informal networks reinforced by generalized reciprocity – that is, through social capital.

(Putnam, 2001, p.147)

Governments and institutions appear to be accepting responsibility for individual, family and community well-being in ways that people and networks might have otherwise in the past. The quote above is drawn from a reference to legal institutions and the rules that govern transactions that might have been sealed with a verbal agreement or handshake historically.

The extent to which individuals trust governments and organizations is only one aspect of this third dimension of trust. With increasing reliance on community organizations to substitute for natural networks and relationships, trust must exist between systems at all levels. In the Glasgow research, a role was identified for the municipality to support “bridging” among organizations – “there are misunderstandings, e.g. the voluntary sector mistrusting the private sector, etc. In a lot of cases this mistrust is wrong. More bridging can help to break down these barriers between organisations” (FMR Research, 2006, p.57).

Consistent with the Glasgow findings, municipalities – through FCSS programs – do bridge organizations and help to develop trust by removing barriers. Referring to the advancement of relationships among seniors organizations in a region, one project participant commented:

FCSS creates an opportunity for the connection that might not have been there. It may just be providing support like meeting space to get together, some administrative support to be able to coordinate that, and then make the setting for people to be able to connect. Once that connection is made then there's a willingness to create relationships with those seniors organizations. (Interview with M. Clark, 2013)

The notion of individual and group reliance or dependence on FCSS emerged as a theme among project participants. When asked about roles in building trust, one project participant addressed the need to step back once a group has been empowered citing “We get them going and then they just grow from there” (2013). There appears to be some understanding and confidence among people and groups in communities that FCSS is a stable force, and trust they can be called upon from time to time as required.

Two comments resonated in concluding the review of literature relative to trust. First, Putnam (2001) indicates that “honesty and trust lubricate the inevitable frictions of social life” (p.135), and second, Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2001) suggest that “as the many examples of civil conflict around the world testify, trust is more easily destroyed than (re)built” (p.7-8). These two comments can be applied to all three aspects of trust: trust among individuals personally familiar to one another, trust that one has for strangers or people early in their relationships, and trust for governments and organizations.

Depicting trust as a concept in isolation of the other four dimensions of social capital proves challenging. To have trust, one must be in a relationship with or connected to another individual or organization. Using the metaphor of the quilt, trust might represent but one thread woven throughout this project – groups and networks are founded and succeed in building cohesion or taking collective action based on the value of trust.

Trust:

(Narrator)

To have a strong social fabric, people need to trust one another, and trust in systems like government, health care and police – how much we trust one another depends on the amount and frequency of our connection. The research in this area refers to three kinds of trust – thin trust, thick trust, and the trust for organizations and systems.

Thin trust is the relationship that develops between people who come into contact with one another on a casual basis – the neighbourhood barista, the city bus driver or the parents dropping

their children off at school each day. While you may not know their names, you trust them to provide safe beverages or safe transportation, and to obey traffic rules. This is thin trust.

(Cameron)

Sometimes, when people are new to a community or don't have others around for support, they look for help through community programs or services. As FCSS is available in virtually every Alberta community, they are often the first line of support – especially in smaller rural communities.

(R. Bowman)

When people start to engage with us and find out what it is that we offer I think most people come into the office and they are not sure about us. So they kind of test the waters a little bit to find out if we are approachable, and can maintain confidentiality, and then they will feel a little more relaxed to talk about what it is that they are really looking for.

(Cameron)

Another way that people begin to build trust and relationships is by going out and meeting people at public events or activities. FCSS seeks to engage people and then empower them to build strong networks among themselves.

(S. Nagel)

We do a lot of teas, social teas, volunteer events, just community where we get a lot of diverse groups of people in for that, and then you start to build those relationships. And being there as well, and not just organizing it and then not being there.

(Cameron)

As trust grows and people become more familiar with one another, thick trust emerges. These relationships generally result over time, after people have the chance to meet over and over, and to share experiences with one another.

(S. Nagel)

One of the things that is important to FCSS is to empower people and to help them build those relationships amongst themselves, and not necessarily just between us and them...I think the trust develops once people start using our services and they do experience the support and help they can get through us and knowing that we do connect them to what they need. And that just grows deeper.

(R. Bowman)

Trust on a day-to-day basis is built by knowing where people are and how to hook people up.

(Narrator)

According to Putnam, people who trust one another in community tend to volunteer more, give to charity, participate in events and political activities, and even donate blood more often – when people feel trusted, they give that trust back to the community.

But how much trust and what kind of trust is best for community?

Thick trust between people is beneficial – as long as people are working together for the betterment of the community, and are open to welcoming new people into the group. Otherwise, a community dominated by thick trust between just a few can be isolating and cliquish for new people.

Putnam also suggests that high levels of thin trust in community are most important. When people generally trust one another to live by a shared set of beliefs and values, it helps people to connect.

(Cameron)

It's a balancing act – we need people close to us who we can trust unconditionally, yet, since we are living in communities, our social fabric is actually stronger if we also generally trust the people living, playing and working in our community.

While FCSS helps people build trust with one another through programs and events that bring people together, they also support the development of trust between individuals and groups, and between different groups through the facilitation and coordination of meetings and community initiatives.

(S. Nagel)

A lot of it isn't just [about] people themselves being connected to FCSS and trusting FCSS but the organizations in the community as well, and it is a well-connected group ... that do know we offer confidentiality. We meet privately. They know we're not going to go gossip, and that can be a big concern in a small town.

(Cameron)

Trust is a great place to start in looking at social capital – it really is foundational. Community trust isn't dependent on FCSS, but the success of FCSS programs is entirely dependent on community trust. FCSS could not have existed for the past 40 years if the communities it serves didn't see it as a trusted resource.

To be successful, FCSS programs need to maintain confidentiality, deliver services with integrity, and treat individuals with respect – after all, “trust is more easily destroyed than built, or rebuilt.”

As we move forward and explore the other dimensions of social capital, you will see threads of trust embedded in each of the stories.

Let's move from trust, to social cohesion and inclusion.

Social Cohesion and Inclusion

World Bank Implementation Framework (2011)

Social Cohesion and Inclusion

Social cohesion manifests in individuals who are willing and able to work together to address common needs, overcome constraints, and consider diverse interests. They are able to resolve differences in a civil, non-confrontational way. Inclusion promotes equal access to opportunities, and removes both formal and informal barriers to participation.

Baum and Ziersch (2003) succinctly describe two different ways in which individuals and groups might connect with one another; “*bonding* social capital refers to horizontal tight knit ties between individuals or groups sharing similar demographic characteristics” whereas, “*bridging* and *linking* social capital refer to ties that cut across different communities/individuals” (p.320). To be effective, both bonding and bridging social capital need to be present. “High levels of social cohesion occur where vertical social capital is strong, as reflected in an open, accountable relationship between the state and individuals and communities, and where bridging social capital predominates” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.18).

Survey responses in this dimension of social capital, particularly bonding social capital, were strong among FCSS directors, providing some excellent opportunities for interviews and experiences. While bonding and bridging social capital are clearly distinct from one another, the examples in this project contain elements of both. In Viking, community members participated in *Front Yard Barbeques*, a neighbourhood development project coordinated by the local FCSS program, and designed “to draw the community closer together, to get to know your neighbours, for the different age groups to get to know each other better, and in an informal and fun setting” (Interview with J. Stewart, 2013).

In Red Deer, a community development process was initiated to help bridge the gaps between groups of people having different interests in the downtown; the process brought

together business people, individuals seeking services and supports in the downtown, service providers, and individuals that lived in the area. One of the project participants described the process as follows:

We started off by going down to the street level [to build] relationships with people that were identified as people that would come out and start to get engaged [in] addressing some of the issues in their own neighbourhood. From there we went on to form a loosely knit group that would be prepared to come out and meet on a regular basis and talk about how to move the needle on some of these issues using a project-based approach.

(Interview with B. Einarson, 2013)

In both Viking and Red Deer, the interviewees noted the relaxed and casual nature of their projects. In a research project conducted through the University of Denver, Daniel Brisson (2009) distinguishes between formal and informal social capital in that informal social capital “refers to relationships developed without membership in a formal group” (p.170). The first two examples explored in the video could be considered informal in nature – participants were not required to register their participation and their involvement was entirely voluntary.

In Three Hills, the Kneehill County FCSS program offered their *Community Discovery Night* as an example of social cohesion and inclusion. Formal in nature for the participating groups and organizations, it was an informal event for community members seeking to explore opportunities for fall and winter activities. This event was also an excellent example of bonding and bridging social capital – people could register to participate in programs that would bring them together with others sharing similar interests, and both citizens and organizations could connect with people having diverse interests and backgrounds.

A fourth example of social cohesion and inclusion involves a group of youth who expressed a desire to come together as they had a shared interest in finding their collective voice. This could be seen as an example of formal bonding social capital. As the group became more familiar with one another and thick trust emerged among members, one member felt safe enough to “come out” to the group. What started as a formal bonding process quickly assumed elements of informal bridging as the group supported the young man in connecting with his identity and communicating with other community members about his sexual orientation. “It was through his courage and the support he received from his peers that sparked Sexual and Gender Minority Awareness as a topic at a Youth Conference which was planned by our Youth Council this spring” (Online Participant, 2013).

The online results generated some interesting observations for the dimension of social cohesion and inclusion. Question #2 (see Figure 4) was designed to measure the extent to which FCSS influences bonding social capital and resulted in a 100% response indicating either “A lot” (71%) or “Some” (29%). Alternately, question #2 was designed to measure bridging or linking social capital and resulted in 94% indicating “A lot” (35%) or “Some” (59%). The shift between “A lot” and “Some” between these two different questions may be summarized in this statement drawn from the qualitative survey responses:

It is always easier to bring people together who have similar interests and we do that through programs and services aimed at specific groups, eg. young moms, youth, seniors, etc. While it is less easy to bring people together for diverse interests and backgrounds we work at it through supporting intergenerational programs. (Online Participant, 2013)

This sentiment was echoed by one of the interviewees:

There are always things we can improve on. I think the challenge is to work with populations that are difficult to work with. Not only populations but agencies, other partners, professional partners, that aren't so much like [us] but that we need to stretch and to work with, and ultimately you would get a better project. (Interview with J. Stewart, 2013)

This finding will be discussed more in the conclusion of the project.

While bonds that people make within support groups serve to re-connect individuals by providing hope and courage, an additional benefit is emerging in that otherwise private concerns are becoming more known and better understood; "these newer support groups bring what were thought to be private problems into the public realm" (Putnam, 2001, p.151). In the example of the young man confronting his sexual orientation through the youth group, the group's FCSS liaison commented that, "this individual brought up what it was like for him to be in ... community and to struggle with how to talk to his community and to be accepted" (Interview with anonymous participant, 2013).

For communities in Alberta, bonding and bridging social capital might be seen in the way community organizations gather to address common issues and opportunities without isolating themselves or creating silos that are disconnected from other related initiatives or groups. Using the example of poverty and ethnic diversity, significant barriers continue to exist for people throughout the world. In Alberta, the well-being of people living in poverty and of Aboriginal descent is identified as a driver of change in the new Government of Alberta Social Policy Framework. "Rising disparity diminishes social cohesion and challenges the idea that all Albertans have an equal opportunity to be successful" (Alberta Government, 2013, p.24).

Putnam offers an interesting perspective on an emerging social cohesion and inclusion trend for marginalized populations in America; “an increasing body of evidence suggests that support groups – and especially the interpersonal ties they offer – provide measureable health and emotional benefits to many participants” (2001, p.151). The formation of small groups and networks focused on bonding social capital among people with shared issues or conditions are emerging as proxy forms of natural connections and relationships. “In some respects support groups substitute for other intimate ties that have been weakened in our fragmented society, serving people who are disconnected from more conventional social networks” (Putnam, 2001, p.151).

In the absence of social cohesion and inclusion, *social exclusion* may result. Baum and Ziersch (2003) indicate that “broadly defined, social exclusion refers to the societal and institutional processes that exclude certain groups from full participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of societies” (p.321). By this definition, true achievement of social capital requires complete inclusion and engagement of all groups. Jane Jacobs (1961) highlights the impact of social exclusion in her discussion of neighbourhood slums, and offers helpful insights into a better way:

Conventional planning approaches to slums and slum dwellers are thoroughly paternalistic. The trouble with paternalists is that they want to make impossibly profound changes, and they choose impossibly superficial means for doing so. To overcome slums, we must regard slum dwellers as people capable of understanding and acting upon their own self-interest, which they certainly are. We need to discern, respect and build upon the forces for regeneration that exist in slums themselves, and that demonstrably

work in real cities. This is far from trying to patronize people into a better life, and it is far from what is done today. (p.271)

Communities can serve as incubators for social exclusion in both physical and social realms. The slums described by Jane Jacobs become the physical manifestations of social exclusion – pockets of ethnic or economic bonding social capital that become disconnected from other social groups and networks. All too often, vertical social capital is weakened between governments and marginalized populations because the necessary social and economic investments are difficult to justify; “weak vertical links combined with strong bonding social capital ... will lead to low levels of social cohesion. The society will be marked by exclusion, inequity, and oppression” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.18). For individuals, social exclusion may show up as isolation among seniors’ populations or for newcomers to a community. When people have lost members of their social network or have yet to establish relationships with others, isolation and social exclusion can result.

The FCSS examples chosen to demonstrate social cohesion and inclusion also have elements of trust. The World Bank’s five dimensions of social capital are not meant to be mutually exclusive – trust contributes to social cohesion and inclusion, and similarly, the connections made between people help to move individuals from thin trust to thick trust.

Social Cohesion and Inclusion:

(Narrator)

Social cohesion is the ability of individuals to come together and for people to feel a sense of connection with one another. When this connection happens between individuals and groups sharing similar demographic characteristics – such as ethnicity, place of origin, economic status, or even ages and stages of life, it is known as **bonding** social capital.

Alternatively, **bridging** or **linking** social capital is the connection that happens across different communities or individuals.

One of the Alberta’s FCSS outcomes is to develop interpersonal and group skills, enhance

constructive relationships, and support people to be active participants in their communities. In essence, the very nature of FCSS serves as an antidote to social exclusion.

(Cameron)

To begin the exploration of social cohesion and inclusion, let's head out to Viking, Alberta with a population of roughly 1000 people, where the local FCSS program facilitated, for its second year, a program entitled *Front Yard Barbeques*.

(J. Stewart)

We are doing front yard barbecues tonight. We have five people participating in the front yard barbecues, with the purpose of it being to draw the community closer together, to get to know your neighbors, for the different age groups to get to know each other better, and in an informal and fun setting.

There's always a perception that because we live in a small town that we do know everybody. But, last year when we did this for the first time we found out that, no, not everybody does know one another. There were a lot of introductions made.

(Cameron)

Each barbeque in the community was a little different – some, because of the particular neighbourhood, brought together people of similar backgrounds and social status – whether that is seniors, or neighbourhoods with a lot of young families. In this regard, the barbeques were promoting bonds between people with similar characteristics.

In other parts of town, while bonds were still being encouraged among community members, people were coming together from a variety of backgrounds and bridging the different characteristics.

(J. Stewart)

We really wanted to encourage family focused activities which this is a family focused activity, and also intergenerational. It's both of those. We found that last year when we did this for the first time, one lady commented that she hoped the younger people felt safer in the neighborhood because they knew them now and the younger people knew them, and they knew them. We think we know everybody in a small town, but really we don't.

(Cameron)

In Red Deer, certain parts of the downtown were starting to show tension between different groups – groups bonded by their shared experiences and interests – those conducting business in the downtown, those accessing social supports in the downtown, and people living or working in a particular section of the downtown. The City of Red Deer started a community development approach to help link or bridge the different interests. The common ground agreed upon by the different groups resulted in a neighbourhood mural project.

I asked the Community Facilitator about the connections between groups and how this changed some of the neighbourhood dynamics.

(B. Einarson)

I think they are connected within their own community but not necessarily into some of the other communities that are operating within the downtown core. In particular, one of our aboriginal artist that was identified in this process who, already had a history of producing some top quality paintings, he was able to get involved as well which was a highlight, because he was someone that accesses services in this particular area and was interested in getting involved, and we were happy to be able to have him participate in the process, because it is a relationship that has proved to be a very powerful one.

When you start to look at how the perceptions have changed just amongst the people that have been involved in this process from the beginning, people are feeling safer when they come downtown because they have the relationships with folks that are accessing services or who may be homeless or living with addictions and, because of the connections they have made working on these murals, they have a sense of safety now as opposed to a sense of fear when they come down into the downtown core of Red Deer.

So, I think there's a lot of benefits that are growing out of this type of initiative that we didn't anticipate in the first place. That sense of safety and well-being is a very powerful one.

(Cameron)

Whether FCSS is involved in supporting people to develop stronger bonds between one another, or to bridge different sets of interests, there is another aspect of social cohesion and inclusion beyond bonding and bridging social capital – it is the way in which social capital is built – formally or informally.

(Narrator)

In a research study conducted by the University of Denver, a distinction was made between formal and informal social capital – the difference being the setting or circumstances where people meet. Formal social capital happens in scheduled or programmed settings as opposed to informal social capital, which happens through casual or unstructured settings.

(Cameron)

This is an important distinction for the work that FCSS does across Alberta. In the case of Viking's front yard barbeques or the mural project in downtown Red Deer, FCSS primarily played a facilitative role. In this role, FCSS establishes a setting or helps to create favorable conditions for people to connect – a setting where informal social capital can flourish.

In this next example from Three Hills, the Kneehill Regional FCSS program annually creates an environment for people to connect. Shelley describes the event and the role FCSS plays in pulling it together.

(S. Jackson)

So, our community discovery night is something started about eight years ago. It is an opportunity for us to connect community with the variety of action activities we have going on in our area. So, we kind of connected a lot with recreation, and then we also bring in service clubs, community groups, and then helping agencies and organizations. So it is a chance for us, for people to see all that is offered in their community.

Is very much a coordination role so, we play that role of facilitation. So we organize the venue. We invite all the people, the players who need to be here for the event. And then we do all of the advertising, so it is about connecting with communities to let them know the event is happening, connecting with those organizations and agencies, and recreation sport organizations to get them at the event as well.

(Cameron)

This example begins to demonstrate that bonding and bridging social capital aren't mutually exclusive – neither are the concepts of formal and informal social capital. While people may bond through common interests or circumstances, they may come from different demographic backgrounds. In the same way, people of similar demographic backgrounds may have no interests or connections with each other outside of age, ethnicity or socio-economic status.

Events like the Community Discovery Night can help to bring together people with shared interests.

(S. Jackson)

Just last year, we had junior achievers here, and we actually got a thank you card after the event was over, that said they connected with three different individuals in the community. To volunteer with the organization. To move their objectives and mission forward. People they never would have thought of finding a connection, a bond with happened, because they showed up for an hour and a half to connect with their community through this event.

(Cameron)

Similarly, groups and organizations with seemingly different mandates have the opportunity to build linkages or bridges through events like the Community Discovery Night.

(S. Jackson)

One of the things we have found has happened here, is that we have some organizations that are very specific in their mission, ie. the shelter out of Strathmore. We find some of our community members don't really engage with them a lot because it is one of those topics that is hard to engage people on because it can seem kind of negative. But, what we have found is, that they also find this as an amazing opportunity to connect with other organizations. Things like the Chamber of Commerce. So, they end up doing a presentation at the Chamber of Commerce to get a different group that they wouldn't have connected with before because they don't have those connections. We put this venue together with 67 organizations coming together they do sometimes find some unlikely partners they may not have thought of before.

(Cameron)

The Community Discovery Night in Three Hills is informal for the community members that come to check out the different community organizations and fall activities, yet it is formal for the organizations because they need to register and commit to attending and booking a space at the event. It's a great example of how the threads of formal and informal social capital – and bonding and bridging – are often interwoven.

In a different community, I had an opportunity to hear about a youth group that came together to address the lack of control they were feeling about their role in society. They were looking for the opportunity to influence community decisions and issues that affected them.

This example demonstrates how FCSS can use a formal structure to bridge or link the interests of a particular demographic group – in this case youth – to other community groups and government programs. As trust built in the group, however, this became a story of bonding and bridging for a member of a youth council. The trust and close bonds developed between youth council members created a safe environment for one member in particular.

To protect the identity of the youth involved in this example, the speaker and community will not be identified.

(Interviewee)

We had one youth council member who had been with us for a number of years, and throughout that time in high school, he had been struggling with his sexual orientation. And through his strength from being part of that youth Council, he got comfortable with our youth members and became really close friends over those years. And one day he decided to come out to our youth council members that he was gay. So, that first step for him was huge.

The support of our youth Council gave him strength to talk to people at school, to talk to his teachers, and to talk to his community as a whole. It started small and it started to grow. When we started planning our youth conference for 2013, and all the youth at the meeting were beginning to talk about the topics they wanted to discuss, this individual brought up what it was like for him to be in a rural community and to struggle with how to talk to his community, and to be accepted.

What we decided to do was to find a presentation that could help other youth as well as [him] at that time. So, at the conference itself, we invited ... an organization to talk about sexual and gender minority. [It] was a great presentation for the 80 youth at the conference and the learning that came from it [was] amazing.

(Cameron)

So, in this section, we have explored the concepts of **bonding** social capital – the connections that people make with those who have similar demographic characteristics or interests – and **bridging** social capital - the connections that link different groups of people. For social cohesion and inclusion to be strong, both bonding and bridging social capital need to be present.

If a community is dominated by strongly bonded groups and there is little linkage between those

groups or systems people will begin to feel disconnected from one another. In this environment, exclusion, inequality and oppression are able to take root.

Alberta's new Social Policy Framework indicates that as the disparity or differences between people rise, it "diminishes social cohesion and challenges the idea that all Albertans have an equal opportunity to be successful"

Fortunately, in the midst of this rising disparity, FCSS appears to be a mechanism for supporting strong social cohesion and inclusion – consistent with the research from the World Bank, FCSS works with many different individuals, within and among many different groups and organizations, and between many levels of government – all of which build and support Alberta's social fabric.

So, when community members feel connected to others with similar interests, to other people with different interests and backgrounds, and to government institutions and systems, strong social cohesion and inclusion exists. The World Bank notes that when people or families step back, or withdraw from social interaction, their isolation actually deprives the community of their voice, and of the contribution they could have made to improve their situation. This is known as social exclusion.

(Narrator)

If someone has recently become withdrawn or isolated because of a loss – perhaps the loss of a loved one or a job – or a change – such as a move across town or to a new country – that isolation is an indicator of social exclusion.

On a community level, social exclusion can exist when people don't feel welcome, comfortable or safe in a particular neighbourhood – perhaps due to a perception that people have about a particular neighbourhood, or because of physical barriers to keep people out.

Understanding social cohesion and inclusion helps to frame the next discussion – the role that groups and networks have in building social capital.

Groups and Networks

World Bank Implementation Framework (2011)

Groups and Networks

Organizational support and network activities are crucial for bridging and linking social capital. Engagements of people to organize themselves and mobilize resources to solve problems of common interest are some of the outputs from groups and networks that enhance or build upon social capital. The effectiveness of groups and networks and the extent to which they can help disseminate information, reduce opportunistic behavior and facilitate collective decision-making depends upon many aspects of these groups, reflecting their structure, their membership and the way they function.

The way people gather and organize in community is a strong indicator of social capital; this includes the concentration and mix of people participating, how they organize and make decisions and the manner in which they connect with other groups and networks. “Social networks refer to the ties between individuals or groups and could be considered the “structural” element of social capital” (Baum & Ziersch, 2003, p.321). From the World Bank Social Capital Initiative we learn that “a growing body of empirical evidence suggests that the density of social networks and institutions, and the nature of interpersonal interactions that underlie them, significantly affect the efficiency and sustainability of development programs” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.1).

According to the FCSS Regulations, the health of groups and networks in a community are critical outcomes as programs are to “help people to develop interpersonal and group skills which enhance constructive relationships among people” (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2010, p.1). Clearly, the focus of FCSS programs in Alberta is the development of skills and attributes of the people or members of the groups themselves. Putnam (2001) indicates that American groups are trending away from member connection and development to focus on organizational mandate; “The proliferating new organizations are professionally staffed

advocacy organizations, not member-centered, locally based associations. The newer groups focus on expressing policy views in the national political debate, not on providing regular connection *among* individual members at the grass roots” (p.51).

Survey responses from FCSS directors did not appear to be consistent with Putnam's reflection on trends in the United States. When asked about the extent to which FCSS builds social capital by supporting groups and networks, 82% of the online respondents indicated “A lot” – the balance, 18%, indicated “Some”. This statement was the most supported phrase within the survey, and generated qualitative responses from almost every online participant. Many FCSS directors referred to their roles in supporting and facilitating interagency groups, parenting groups, boards, community consultations, student and youth groups, seniors groups, and regional networks. Support for groups and networks ranged between communities and depended on the nature of the organization, but included assistance with facilitation, providing meeting spaces, notifying participants, creating agendas and taking minutes, providing leadership support, and helping with promotion. As one online participant noted, “the FCSS approach is meant to ensure the support and help provided to groups or networks does not create dependencies (on FCSS or other government bodies) but rather encourages collaboration, skill building, professional development and networking and long term planning” (2013). Another online participant indicated that, “FCSS is often at the forefront of meeting social needs by hosting community consultations, finding resources (grants, volunteers, local leaders, etc.), coordinating and collaborating, and building positive relationships” (2013).

In Fairview, a northern community of approximately 3000 people located in Alberta's Peace Country (Fairview, 2013), FCSS was approached by a parent seeking support in raising her teenager. Because this parent was dedicated to having rules and boundaries, she felt isolated

in her approach. FCSS supported this individual in reaching out to other parents of teens, and a parent network was formed. "We have a parent who is the facilitator. We helped her set the guidelines for the group, the confidentiality, and the respect for one another. And we are there if she needs us" (Interview with R. Stewart, 2013). The FCSS director in Fairview also noted that they support the group in accessing information, bringing in different resource people to support the work of the group, and provide administrative assistance with meeting reminders and print materials.

In Southern Alberta, one project participant referenced an after-school counselling group supported by FCSS to help address issues of racism and discrimination between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in the community; "through discussion, team building activities, field trips and other personal development projects," the students can realize "that there is more to a person than the color of their skin and their cultural background" (Online Participant, 2013). Other examples from the community included support for local women to coordinate an annual Women's Conference, and liaison support for the local FCSS Board to meet monthly so that members can "bring their own experiences and expertise to the FCSS organization, and help guide the direction of the organization in a way that most benefits the whole community" (Online Participant, 2013).

Among the roles and responsibilities identified in Alberta's Social Policy Framework, "non-profit and voluntary sector associations, foundations, and other funders also play a role in convening groups around shared interests and building system capacity" (Alberta Government, 2013, p.16). A significant part of the system capacity is the ability of groups to maintain strong structures "through established roles, social networks and other social structures supplemented by rules, procedures, and precedents" (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.5). A trend observed

in the United States is the disconnect between the number of actual groups and organizations, and the actual responsibilities of 'members' – "What really matters from the point of view of social capital and civic engagement is not merely nominal membership, but active and involved membership" (Putnam, 2001, p.58). The operation and management of groups and organizations takes on different priorities when the emphasis is on advancement of policy perspectives rather than the development and connection between group members. Putnam (2001) indicates that "Americans no longer spend much time in community organizations – we've stopped doing committee work, stopped serving as officers, and stopped going to meetings" (p.64). Local organizations that bring together community members to make decisions that affect friends and neighbours indicate strong social capital.

Beyond the boundaries of local communities, FCSS demonstrates its role as a catalyst for broader social policy issues. The FCSS Association of Alberta represents member communities and programs through its 17-member Board by "identifying common concerns and issues related to FCSS, communicating those issues, together with proposed solutions, to other members and to the provincial government, and supporting communities by developing tools to meet local needs and mandates" (Alberta Human Services, 2013). Having strong connections to the FCSSAA, including full membership on the FCSSAA Board, the FCSS Director's Network Society supports professional development and communication among FCSS directors and staff across Alberta (Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta, 2013). According to one online participant:

Through FCSSAA we can network with communities all across Alberta, and we share ideas. We share successes and failures. There is no ownership of a good program or

idea, any FCSS will share information with other FCSS if that is what they need to do to fill a need in their community. (2013)

The networking and connection between Alberta communities extends beyond the topic of FCSS. The Inter-City Forum on Social Policy (ICFSP) is a network of Alberta's cities and major urban areas that includes both elected officials and senior administrators, often FCSS directors:

ICFSP acts as a vehicle for information-sharing, networking and advocacy for and among Alberta cities and other major urban areas, and the people who live in them. Its purpose is to address social policy, program and service issues that are of concern to Alberta and Alberta urban municipalities. (Action to End Poverty in Alberta, 2013)

These three examples, the FCSSAA, the FCSS Director's Network Society, and the ICFSP, appear to contain the necessary ingredients for quality networks as described by Flora and Flora (1993) including "linkages with others in similar circumstances and developing vertical networks to provide diverse sources – both within and outside the community – of experience and knowledge" (p.48).

The Emergency Social Services Network of Alberta (ESSNA) is an example highlighted by one of the project participants; "ESSNA is a voluntary group of ESS representatives from municipalities and First Nations communities, and utilizes a model of collaboration and consensual decision making" (ESSNA, 2013). There is a very strong connection between the work of FCSS and Emergency Social Services in Alberta as:

People connected to emergency social services are those working in FCSS as FCSS directors. They are on the ground, they know the community and in the majority of

communities, not all, but the majority, the FCSS director also serves a role in emergency social services. (Interview with D. Laing, 2013)

While the FCSSAA and the FCSS Director's Network Society are legal entities, the ICFSP and ESSNA exist simply as loose affiliations between communities – and have so for many years. All four organizations are member-driven with activities and initiatives designed and implemented by the people gathered around the table. “We have groups within the network (ESSNA) that focus on different issues such as communication, research, and our annual forum. And they take on the job and the work of making sure they plan those particular items for the network” (Interview with D. Laing, 2013).

Grootaert & van Bastelaer (2001) affirm the strength of the network affiliations among groups like ICFSP and ESSNA as they are mostly bound by roles, social networks and relationships with rules, procedures and precedents being supplementary (p.5). Strong groups and networks appear to contribute to good relationships among Alberta communities, and specifically among FCSS directors. This theme was echoed throughout the survey and interview responses. After responding to the Northern Alberta wildfires in 2011, and most recently the Southern Alberta floods in 2013, one project participant reflected on the value of the emergency social services network citing, “what benefited me was, and what I felt really saved me was my connection to and my relationship with my colleagues. And it was first and foremost my FCSS colleagues” (Interview with D. Laing, 2013).

Consistently, reports from other jurisdictions reflect the importance of social capital among individuals, families and communities in disaster situations. In a study of bonding, bridging and linking social capital following hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Hawkins and Maurer (2010) indicate:

Social work can provide the foundation to help clients connect to and use their positive social capital as a survival mechanism, as a strength builder and as a resource for rebuilding. Further, social workers can help communities identify natural sources of positive social capital as well as sources from the outside. These connections, if used to their maximum benefit, could help individuals, families and communities to survive difficult times and move forwards to establish new communities and connections.

(p.1789-1790)

The strength of Alberta's FCSS network between communities not only supports individuals and families in the immediate aftermath of crisis, but remains a constant source of support and follow-up long after the emergency response and into recovery and rebuilding phases. In February 2014, ESSNA will host a debrief event for ESS first responders and key stakeholders to examine opportunities and challenges from the 2013 Southern Alberta floods. Many of the participants, not all, are expected to be FCSS directors that assumed these key roles during the event (ESSNA meeting notes, 2013).

This segment of the video documentary examines the structures, roles and relationships of groups and networks supported by FCSS at both local and provincial levels. Where provincial networks exist and membership is comprised largely of FCSS, there are, more often than not, groups and networks of local volunteers and members working toward similar objectives at the local level. Consistently, local and provincial groups and networks supported by FCSS tend to be recognized for their own mandates and objectives as they evolve and become empowered. As FCSS moves on to help other organizations, they are seldom acknowledged or recognized for the contributions they have made to groups and networks along the way.

Groups and Networks:

(Narrator)

Trust was described earlier as the **cognitive** or thinking aspect of social capital. Alternately, the role of groups and networks in society is the **structural** part of social capital. Groups and networks are one way that people can feel included in trusted relationships and in this section, groups and networks will be referred to as more formal structures – more like clubs and organizations than a group of friends getting together for dinner.

Robert Putnam suggests that in the United States, groups and networks are becoming more about policy development and less about the connections and relationships between group members themselves. Findings from this project suggest that FCSS helps to create the environment for citizens to remain active and engaged in their communities.

(Cameron)

While Putnam may be reporting on his observations south of the border, this theory isn't necessarily playing out at the local level in Alberta – in fact, there appears to be considerable evidence that FCSS contributes to strong, member-driven groups and networks in communities across the province – groups that provide valuable community service as opposed to simply advocating or lobbying for resources.

This section will explore two examples – one example looks at member involvement in a group at the local level, and the second will examine a network that exists between Alberta communities.

In Fairview, a rural community in Northern Alberta's Peace Region, Rebecca provides an example of a parenting group that would have common elements of empowered groups found across Alberta.

(R Stewart)

We had a parent and she came to us. She really wanted support. She had a teenage son, and felt like she was the parent, that because she had rules and boundaries, she felt like she was by herself. And she really felt isolated. So we took her concerns and we also wanted her to be part of the solution, so that is how the parent network come about.

We have a parent who is the facilitator. We helped her set the guidelines for the group, the confidentiality, and the respect one another. And we are there if she needs us. And after the meetings, the next morning, she often comes in and kind of debriefs and let us know where things are going so that we can help her be in that direction that she wants to be going. But mostly it's the parents empowering parents, so we are there to support, and give some information to one another and just to get that isolation issue off the table.

(Cameron)

The convenor or facilitator role that many FCSS programs play in supporting local groups and networks is important. This function directly aligns with the theories of social capital – FCSS is very much a catalyst for strong groups and networks in the community, while ensuring that

members are empowered to move in directions appropriate to their circumstances.

(R Stewart)

Okay, we are kind of the connector. We make the pamphlets. We have the email list; we send emails out to remind parents that the meeting is on a certain night. We listen to what the parents want as far as information, and then we can make sure that the resources that we can provide are available to them. And also, the resources in the community that they might need to be linked to.

(Cameron)

The downside to the role of facilitator, if there is one, is that FCSS is often invisible in the process. FCSS directors are very familiar with the sentiment that, “if we do this right, nobody will know we were there”. It is an underlying theme of FCSS – that the community believes they did it themselves! While this is great for building community social capital, it doesn't always serve FCSS well when funders and elected officials are trying to form a concrete understanding of the FCSS program.

FCSS tends to report on the effectiveness of groups and networks at the local level – that has been the focus of each FCSS program and the responsibility to report on local outcomes is well understood.

Through this project, I have asked FCSS directors to look beyond their own communities, and to think about the impact that FCSS has on regional or provincial groups and networks – the results are quite encouraging.

In communities across Alberta, FCSS supports groups and networks of seniors, parents, and youth... and organizations working through social issues including, but not limited to, issues of poverty, housing, transportation, mental illness, addictions and neighbourhood development.

In taking a closer look, however, the support that FCSS provides to groups and networks that link different communities is where we find some very interesting threads of Alberta's social fabric.

One such group is known as ESSNA – the Emergency Social Services Network of Alberta. Donelda Laing is the Chairperson of this provincial group and the FCSS Director in her home community of Grande Prairie.

(D. Laing)

ESSNA, informally, has been a network for just over 10 years. It started as a way for those doing emergency response and emergency social services in their municipalities to come together. By and large, in Alberta people connected to emergency social services are those working in FCSS as FCSS directors. They are on the ground, they know the community and in the majority of communities, not all, but the majority, the FCSS director also serves a role in emergency social services.

(Cameron)

Using ESS Network of Alberta as an example, I wanted to explore the way in which ESSNA members were involved with the operation and delivery of the network's objectives. Is ESSNA, a professionally staffed advocacy organization, as Putnam would suggest is the trend in the U.S., or does it actually engage its members and support their development in delivery of supports and services?

(D. Laing)

ESSNA serves a purpose of bringing people together around a particular interest which is in serving in emergency social services. The network therefore is structured very loosely. We make decisions by consensus. We have people who are at a very high-level, very knowledgeable, and they bring a lot to the table. We have groups within the network that focus on different issues such as communication, research, and our annual forum. And they take on the job and the work of making sure they plan those particular items for the network. Plus they bring in people from other communities into those subgroups to bring all of that information back to the network.

An important part of coming together in a network like this is that we all need to be committed. And that we are committed both of the work that we do in our communities but we are also committed to the success of each other. And so, it is beneficial for all of us to ensure that we are helping and supporting and contributing to the success of all communities in Alberta. So, the more knowledge we are able to share with each other, and with our provincial networks, the more that's going to benefit us and the more it's going to benefit the people in an emergency, and the more that's going to benefit our communities.

(Cameron)

Donelda stated earlier that not all, but most ESSNA members are also FCSS people working in their local communities, and the relationships between FCSS directors do play a role when disasters strike. I asked Donelda to expand on that relationship between the two groups.

(D. Laing)

From my personal perspective, having worked through, and having been part of two major provincial responses, the Slave Lake and northern Alberta wildfires, and the southern Alberta floods, where I was involved in High River, what benefited me was and what I felt really saved me was my connection to, and my relationship with my colleagues. And it was first and foremost my FCSS colleagues. In the northern Alberta wildfires we were all connected. We knew where all the reception centers were, what they were doing, we didn't have to rely on the provincial operations to tell us what was going on, so we could help and support each other right from the ground. We were in constant contact. That was because of our FCSS network and how we were connected.

And for me the same with the southern Alberta floods. When I went to High River and when I started working on resident re-entry, on the welcome Center, I knew I had to tap into some resources beyond myself and I could turn to this network of people who I knew were trained, and who I knew of their abilities, and who I knew could respond, and if they could not respond, they would be honest with me.

And I think we had a much better response for the citizens in those communities and in all of our communities because we were connected and able to support each other. And we were able to tap into knowledge and expertise far beyond what one person or one group could bring to the effort. I think that served our communities in ways that I'm not sure we can quantify, because I think the value of the relationship was exponential.

(Cameron)

ESSNA is a great example of how the interconnectedness and strength of the FCSS network has laid the foundation so that separate groups such as ESSNA can be more successful during emergencies. Because they can count on pre-existing relationships that augment and sometimes overlap their own ESSNA network of relationships, FCSS provides a kind of provincial foundation that ends up serving beyond its mandate because of its size, relationships and breadth of reach.

(Narrator)

ESSNA is but one example of networks built and supported by FCSS directors across Alberta. Central to FCSS itself, there are two different organizations – the FCSS Association of Alberta, which engages elected officials, local FCSS volunteers and staff; and the FCSS Directors Network Society – a network of FCSS professionals that focus on learning together and making FCSS programs stronger. These two organizations are linked, with ongoing communication and shared membership.

Outside FCSS itself, another group that engages FCSS people and elected officials in Alberta is the Inter-City Forum on Social Policy. Unlike the FCSS Association of Alberta and the FCSS Directors Network, the ICFSP is not a legal entity – it is more similar in structure to ESSNA – a network of people bound by the purpose and mandate of the group, and not by a set of bylaws and regulations that govern their actions. In the case of ICFSP, Alberta's recent focus on poverty reduction can be traced back to the early and relentless efforts of this network.

(Cameron)

As we transition to the next section, it is important to note that there is a strong sense of trust and cohesion among members of the groups and networks described here. Not only are individuals, families and communities connected in Alberta's social fabric, but so too are the three dimensions of social capital discussed to this point. As we move on, we will begin to explore the role that groups and networks have on collective action and cooperation – moving the needle on issues that matter to Albertans.

Collective Action and Cooperation

World Bank Implementation Framework (2011)

Collective Action and Cooperation

The provision of many services requires collective action by a group of individuals. The purposes of collective action may differ widely across communities. In some places, collective action consists primarily of community-organized activities for building and maintaining infrastructure and for providing related public services. In other places, collective action is important for achieving improved governance and accountability, and used for example to lobby elected officials to provide more services to the community.

Collective action and cooperation most often appear in our communities and neighbourhoods in the form of volunteerism and joint initiatives. “Altruism, volunteering, and philanthropy – our readiness to help others – is by some interpretations a central measure of social capital” (Putnam, 2001, p.116). While Putnam indicates that helping others is core to social capital, he provides some important distinctions. “Social capital refers to networks of social connection – doing *with*. Doing *good*, for other people, however laudable, is not part of the *definition* of social capital” (Putnam, 2001, p.117). In this description, the key difference is the level of input and participation of the people affected. Bopp and Bopp (2011) affirm this position indicating that:

Participation is the active engagement of the minds, hearts, and energy of people in the process of their own healing and development. Because of the nature of what development really is, *unless there is meaningful and effective participation, there is no development.* (p.85)

Community organizations with mandates to support volunteer development and civic engagement can often find themselves continually battling the temptation to do *for* people in need. “The hardest thing outside helpers and facilitators of community development need to learn is to detach themselves from their accustomed role of expert or teacher, and instead to

become a partner in learning with community people” (Bopp & Bopp, 2011, p.97). To this point, the perspective of collective action and cooperation is described as primarily positive – Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1993) offer an alternative viewpoint in the discussion of dilemmas.

Collective action and cooperation is grounded in trust. “It is necessary not only to trust others before acting cooperatively, but also to believe that one is trusted *by* others” (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993, p.164). Where social capital is weak due to lack of trust, collective action and cooperation is scarce. “If actors are unable to make credible commitments to one another, they must forgo many opportunities for mutual gain – ruefully, but rationally” (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993, p.164). Moving beyond this particular dilemma often requires third-party intervention that can be costly and inefficient; at the same time, this artificial form of social capital is not sustainable. “Success in overcoming dilemmas of collective action and the self-defeating opportunism that they spawn depends on the broader social context within which any particular game is played” (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993, p.167).

Unlike physical capital, but like human capital, social capital can accumulate as a result of its use. Put differently, social capital is both an input into and an output of collective action. To the extent that social interactions are drawn on to produce a mutually beneficial output, the quantity or quality of these interactions is likely to increase.

(Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.7)

The notion of collective action being considered both as input and output feeds into the academic argument that social capital is indeed ‘capital’ – not unlike physical, human or financial capital. “It is not costless to produce, as it requires an investment – at least in terms of time and effort, if not always money – that can be significant” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001,

p.7). This characteristic of collective action and cooperation therefore suggests a reinforcing feedback loop – “social networks provide the channels through which we recruit one another for good deeds, and social networks foster norms of reciprocity that encourage attention to others’ welfare” (Putnam, 2001, p.117).

The online survey used to introduce this topic to FCSS directors generated a very positive response. When asked about the extent that FCSS builds social capital by bringing people together to cooperate and take action in their community, 97% of survey respondents indicated “A lot” or Some”. This level of response is not surprising, given that one of the province’s FCSS outcomes is to “help people and communities to assume responsibility for decisions and actions that affect them”, and to “provide supports that help sustain people as active participants in the community” (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2010, p.1).

Having the right people at the table is critical when communities or groups aspire to take action. We begin to see the separate dimensions of social capital weaving together – trust helps to bring people together in groups and networks, and their success in achieving results is a direct result of their shared interests.

FCSS aims to build partnerships with all sorts of organizations and individuals within the local community and between communities. FCSS does not build walls or work in silos like many other organizations, FCSS works to break down the walls keeping people and organizations from working together. (Online Participant, 2013)

As Grootaert & van Bastelaer (2001) indicate, this ability to coordinate and facilitate is an investment in social capital, but it isn’t the only role that local FCSS programs play in collective action and cooperation. Often, because of the relationships with individuals and families, FCSS programs are among the first to identify trends at the local level.

FCSS builds social capital, in many respects, by beginning the discussion regarding social issues, before there may be political will. In some instances, it is FCSS that will first recognize an issue or concern, and will begin bringing people and groups together to understand and address the issues. (Online Participant, 2013)

The role that FCSS plays in identifying issues at the local level is critical, especially in many of the rural communities where there is limited access to social programs and services.

FCSS has to recognize itself for the vital role it plays, especially in rural communities. Without FCSS, there would be no common gathering place to discuss social issues and concerns, and FCSS must take pride in the fact that they are the common ground. (Online Participant, 2013)

The networks that bring FCSS practitioners together often result in the identification of trends that communities have in common. The networks also enable local FCSS programs to contribute toward collective action at the scale commensurate with their capacity and resources; “smaller FCSS programs have less staff time, consequently less capacity to participate fully in collaborative action. We need to recognize the support that can be provided through the expertise of larger FCSS programs” (Online Participant, 2013).

The video documentary focuses on one example of collective action and cooperation among FCSS programs in Alberta – the efforts in housing and homelessness that led to Alberta's leadership in ending homelessness. Diane Randell is the FCSS Director in her home community of Lethbridge, and a member of a provincial network known as 7 Cities:

The 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness is a very unique group within the Province of Alberta. It is a network of people who are the leads in ending homelessness in their communities. And so it is an opportunity for us to come together and to share resources

and to share innovations, best practices, consult with each other, as well to provide a forum for us to engage both the federal government and the provincial government in the delivery of the different services that are required. (Interview with D. Randell, 2013)

The creation of Alberta's 7 Cities network has its origins in FCSS, or at least among some of the FCSS directors from the communities involved – Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray (now known as Wood Buffalo), Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat (Cameron & Makhoul, 2009). The organization exists to “share experiences, exchange ideas, support and learn from one another” (7 Cities, 2013). Gathered together in Edmonton to learn about the Government of Canada's new Supporting Community Partnership Initiatives (SCPI) program, “over a cup of coffee and a very casual conversation it was, we need to make sure we stay connected, that we have...that relationship not only with our funders but with each other” (Interview with D. Randell, 2013). The practice of sharing information and being there in support of one another transcended FCSS and embedded itself in the evolution of housing and homelessness practice in Alberta.

It could be argued that the FCSS culture actually created the conditions for Alberta's unique approach. Among the 10 Canadian cities originally identified to receive SCPI funding, four chose a community entity model and six cities opted for a shared entity model – two of those four included Edmonton and Calgary (B. Stearns, personal communication, October 16, 2013). According to early program documents, the community entity was defined as:

An incorporated organization that will receive SCPI funding. It will take on the task of ensuring that community planning is undertaken, decision making mechanisms and administrative practices based on transparency and financial probity are in place for the

calling for project proposals, evaluating proposals and flowing SCPI funding to projects.

(Government of Canada, n.d., p.25)

Alternatively, communities could opt for a shared entity model that would lessen the level of local autonomy and decision making associated with delivery of the program.

The 7 Cities group continues to operate today in its original structure – a network of community leaders in the delivery of housing and homelessness from the original seven cities. Some of the network members are FCSS directors, others are staff from municipal departments that also deliver local FCSS programs, and some represent independent organizations specifically structured to deliver housing and homelessness supports in their communities. In terms of collective action, the cooperative approach used by this group has led to significant investments by the Province of Alberta into ending homelessness, including the development of Canada's first provincial plan to end homelessness, and strong relationships with federal and provincial government officials. More importantly, the shared learning and commitment to support one another has resulted in major social policy shifts – namely the shift from managing symptoms associated with the experience of homelessness, to ending it. “Ending homelessness is a commitment to permanent solutions and not managing a problem” (7 Cities, 2013).

According to the 7 Cities, they “work closely with Cross Ministerial Initiatives to provide community based input on government led initiatives” (7 Cities, 2013). Randell (2013) summarizes the collaborative approach of this group, citing that it's about the:

Relationship that we have ... with the Province. Not only with the seven cities but with other initiatives as well. And it is on the ground, it is grassroots in many ways, it is in community that collectively across the province...is such a positive force that when something needs to get done, it will get done. And it will be accomplished in such a

meaningful way. Where there is ownership. Where there is buy-in. (Interview with D. Randell, 2013)

In this section of the video, I explore the dimension of collective action and cooperation using the example provided of the 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness. In just over a decade, a shift has occurred in Alberta that has taken the issue of homelessness from an obscure discussion emerging in larger centres, to a province-wide approach based on best practices and research worldwide. One doesn't have to look too deep to find connections between FCSS and this collective action.

This example clearly shows the interconnectedness of the FCSS program areas of individuals, families and communities; the five dimensions of social capital outlined in the World Bank's implementation framework; and the FCSS provincial outcome statements. FCSS programs in Alberta tackle complex issues by coordinating collective action while managing connections balanced to ensure that groups and networks operating at local, provincial and national levels are built and maintained through trusting and cohesive relationships.

Collective Action and Cooperation:

(Narrator)

The World Bank indicates that collective action and cooperation are required to build and maintain social infrastructure including community services, and also to achieve improved governance and accountability. This section will explore the dimension of collective action and cooperation through one Alberta example in particular.

In 2000, the Government of Canada extended the reach of a new program designed to address homelessness to mid-sized cities across Canada. While Edmonton and Calgary had already been identified to receive funding, Alberta's mid-sized cities of Grande Prairie, Wood Buffalo, Red Deer, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat came into the program shortly after.

Communities were provided two options for the delivery of the new homelessness resources – a shared entity model that would see the federal government in a key administrative role distributing and managing local funds, or a community entity model that would transfer that

administrative responsibility to the local level. Across Alberta, all seven cities opted for the local autonomy that came along with the community entity model.

(Cameron)

In the early stages of this new program, the government of Canada pulled community representatives together from the seven cities to learn about the administrative roles and responsibilities. I turn to Diane Randell of Lethbridge, who describes what happened next - the eventual formation of a network that is known today as 7 Cities.

(D. Randell)

The early history of the seven cities is so familiar to the FCSS world. We were presented with opportunities for funding around the homelessness issue in our community. Many of the people that were at those initial meetings were FCSS people or from a Social Development or Social Planning department. Very quickly, over a cup of coffee and a very casual conversation it was, we need to make sure we stay connected, that we build that relationship not only with our funders but with each other.

(Cameron)

The ongoing relationship between communities that grew out of the 7 Cities network led to improved practices across the province, sharing of information and results, and ultimately some deeper questions about the efficacy of the homelessness approaches being used at the time.

(D. Randell)

Based on some solid education and some investigation and research, we were starting to learn that there were different ways of approaching this. So it was through some work that Red Deer did in terms of pulling in some resources that the 'ahas' went on that truly said we have to do something different. So, from a grassroots community perspective and engaging our mayors, then went forward to the standing policy committee on community service, and it was there that a real significant shift occurred. From that we got a commitment and funding that we were able to move from managing homelessness to truly ending it. And from there we started the ten year plans. And all of the communities, the seven cities each have a plan in their communities to end homelessness.

(Cameron)

Building effective ten-year plans required the involvement of many different stakeholders. In every case, communities engaged with different government systems, business, the human services sector, and most importantly – people with lived experience – people who had been or still were on the streets.

The credibility that FCSS had in local communities was certainly a contributing factor in putting together these new ten-year plans – especially in the mid-sized cities and where the departments responsible for housing and homelessness were the very same departments responsible for delivery of local FCSS programs.

(D. Randell)

In my mind, we have set the stage. We have set the stage in terms of the context of, again, that

relationship that we have, that we are able to have with the province. Not only with the seven cities but with other initiatives as well. And it is on the ground, it is grassroots in many ways, it is in community that collectively across the province such a positive, it is such a positive force that when something needs to get done, it will get done. And it will be accomplished in such a meaningful way. Where there is ownership. Where there is buy-in. That those groups of community leaders that come together can say, "look what we have done."

(Cameron)

The energy and culture of FCSS is both collaborative and holistic. For more than 40 years, FCSS has been Alberta's flagship of partnership – between municipalities and the province, at the local level, and between communities.

One might argue that the experience and comfort for local autonomy and the comfort of working in partnership with other levels of government created through years of experience with FCSS may have been a contributing factor to this unique response from Alberta's seven cities to adopt the community entity model in the first place.

FCSS seeks to bring the perspectives from community members, elected officials and community leaders to a common table with a mind to ask tough questions and to find innovative solutions.

(Narrator)

Whether the questions focus on complex issues like parenting teens or ending homelessness, the investment that Alberta has made in FCSS creates the environment where problem solving can be accomplished without pointing fingers.

FCSS isn't necessarily the 'answer' to Alberta's tough social issues, but its ability to convene community and facilitate relationships and collaboration is certainly part of the social capital required to move forward. FCSS supports Albertans to work together, to take collective action in a cooperative environment.

The last dimension of social capital outlined by the World Bank is **information and communication**.

Information and Communication

World Bank Implementation Framework (2011)

Information and Communication

Information and communication form the crux of social interactions. Downward flows of information from the policy realm and upward flows from the local level are critical components of the development process. Horizontal information flows strengthen capacity by providing civil society a medium for knowledge and idea exchange. Open dialogue fosters a sense of community, while secrecy breeds suspicion and distrust. Enhancing the dissemination of information can break down negative social capital as well as build trust and cohesion.

“Community, communion, and communication are intimately as well as etymologically related. Communication is a fundamental prerequisite for social and emotional connections” (Putnam, 2001, p.171). Communication, however, is only half the equation – content or information completes this aspect of social capital. The literature helps to explain the power of information in social capital and provides new perspectives on the different forms of communication that influence groups and networks today.

The World Bank provides a succinct explanation about the power of information – “enhancing the dissemination of information can break down negative social capital as well as build trust and cohesion” (The World Bank, 2013). Each of the previous dimensions of social capital rest on the ability of groups and networks to share accurate and timely information. In the case of social capital, information is not limited to academia, facts or figures – quite the opposite. Using employment as an example, information about people and effective networks can be helpful in attracting employees and finding employers. “Researchers have shown that when social networks and institutions are present, unemployed people take advantage of them to good ends. One sees this most in ethnic immigrant communities, where employers rely on their employees to recruit and train new workers” (Putnam, 2001, p.320). In other research, “85 percent of young men in one survey used personal networks to find employment, compared with

just 54-58 percent who said they used state agencies and newspapers” (Putnam, 2001, p.320).

The old adage, *it's not what you know, but who you know*, speaks to the importance and type of information pertinent to social capital. Bopp and Bopp (2011) summarize the significance of information on social change:

One critical dimension of human systems transformation is the “active information” which is shaping it. This active information can be understood in terms of our vision of who we take ourselves to be, what we see as the limits of our potential, and what we believe about the nature, purpose and appropriate processes of the human systems in which we participate. (p.45)

The increased access and affordability to communicate over great distance may impact social capital, but the verdict on the impact of technology is still out. Putnam (2001) observed that by the mid-1970s, the telephone was largely used to connect with friends and neighbours in close proximity, and was ineffective for meeting new people (p.168). His recollection of the telephone era is used to contextualize the pending impacts of the Internet. “The Internet is a powerful tool for the transmission of information among physically distant people. The tougher question is whether that flow of information itself fosters social capital and genuine community” (Putnam, 2001, p.172).

Putnam (2001) presents four challenges facing technology assisted communication improving communities and social capital. The first challenge is the perpetuation of social inequality – “the Internet has *not* mobilized previously inactive groups (with the partial exception of young people) but has instead reinforced existing biases in political participation” (Putnam, 2001, p.174). The second challenge is the inability for text-based messaging to convey important non-verbal cues that exist through face-to-face contact. “Humans are remarkably

effective at sensing nonverbal messages from one another, particularly about emotions, cooperation, and trustworthiness” (Putnam, 2001, p.175). Advancements in technology (e.g. Skype, Face Time and Viber, etc.) since 2001 when *Bowling Alone* was published may address portions of this argument. The third challenge identified by Putnam is labeled ‘cyberbalkanization’ – the ability for people to limit their participation to interest-based networks as opposed to place-based communities (2001, p.178). “In physical communities we are forced to live with people who may differ from us in many ways. But virtual communities offer us the opportunity to construct utopian collectives – communities of interest, education, tastes, beliefs, and skills” (Putnam, 2001, p.178). The final challenge is founded in the unknown – the way in which people will choose to engage through technology is indefinite. “Will the Internet become predominantly a means of active, social communication or a means of passive, private entertainment” (Putnam, 2001, p.179)? Early predictions favor the belief in our human need to live in community and experience people – “computer-mediated communication will turn out to complement, not replace, face-to-face communities” (Putnam, 2001, p.179).

As people engage in groups and networks, there are many opportunities to influence the impacts and directions that technology may have on our patterns of communication. “Dysfunctional systems or those in crisis usually have distorted communication patterns, often created by dysfunctional power centres within the system” (Bopp & Bopp, 2011, p.46). During times of large scale disasters or emergencies, many systems become stressed – including the social networks among evacuees and people impacted by the disaster. “During times of stress, networks composed of intense ties, such as extended families, may be less adaptive, because they are less likely to exchange new information” (Eisenman, D., et.al., 2007, p.S113). With many FCSS programs involved in community disaster planning and response, trust and relationships

among individuals, groups and networks can facilitate effective communication. Functional systems should yield clarity and effective communications.

Project participants indicated a strong sense of importance connected to information and communication. Three key themes emerged from the responses:

- FCSS as an information broker for programs and services available to community members
- FCSS as a repository of program content and best practices for community services, and
- FCSS as a “translator” for language that isn’t always accessible for community members.

Within the first theme, many FCSS programs noted the role they play as resource centres in their communities. Especially in rural communities, people know that FCSS will know – if they have concerns or want to know more about services available to them, they will contact their local FCSS office. “FCSS has to be a wealth of knowledge. Literally, a good FCSS knows of all the resources available in the area, and the limits of those resources” (Online Participant, 2013). One online participant captured the breadth and scope of FCSS in the role of information broker:

Simply by being present in the role of information and referral to social services, FCSS directors are there to answer questions and provide instant information either in person or over the phone. Additionally, we keep our town websites updated, advertise in local newspapers, post notices around town and in the town offices lobby, and multiple brochures are available for people to take with them from the office. We share information via email, meetings and/or telephone conversations with other groups and agencies. By staying in touch with service providers on a regular basis, we help spread the word and keep people informed. Relationship building/maintaining is key to not only

the sharing of information, but to the reception of it and the encouragement to participate. (Online Participant, 2013)

A number of project participants highlighted relationships as being central to the success that FCSS has in this form of information gathering and sharing – in essence, FCSS makes it their business to know. The many partnerships and community relationships at the local level and between communities make it possible for FCSS to know about initiatives before they are even public.

Alternately, a number of FCSS programs identified information distribution as a challenge. “We find it increasingly difficult to get people's attention as there are so many diverse ways that people access information” (Online Participant, 2013). Respondents provided a broad range of strategies and tactics to get information out to their community members, however, with so many means of communicating this remains a challenge.

The second theme that emerged from the survey was about FCSS as a source for best practices and research relative to human services delivery:

In this fast paced technology based world effective communication becomes difficult when it comes to keep up with the trends and the only way to stay on top of sharing information is to know what is happening around us in the field and keeping up to date. (Online Participant, 2013)

To support this form of information and communication, most FCSS programs rely on their external relationships and networks to exchange trends and program outcomes. As indicated earlier, there is nothing proprietary about FCSS – the program culture is one of open sharing and communication between communities. “Regional FCSS programs do get together on a regular basis to share information and discuss trends and best practices. We also share information with

programs throughout the region to assess regional issues and trends” (Online Participant, 2013, p.12).

The final theme that emerged in this section was the concept of FCSS as a community ‘translator’; “FCSS is sometimes the voice for people who do not speak the language – sometimes that language is political jargon, and sometimes it is literally not English” (Online Participant, 2013, p.17). This concept stood out as being important. Meadows (2008) indicates that language “can serve as a medium through which we create new understandings and new realities as we begin to talk about them. In fact, we don’t talk about what we see; we see only what we can talk about” (p.174). In the past several years, the language used in the human services sector has changed considerably. Increased understanding of complexity, brain research and the impacts of adverse childhood experiences are examples shaping the way we approach the work of FCSS. The tools and methods of social change have created new language that requires interpretation for many people – regardless of their English comprehension. One project participant commented:

I just found that it is difficult for some people to understand the language of other organizations. So, if somebody has a form to fill out, or if they are trying to understand something, or to get something done through the government it's not easy for them to understand what the government needs or their agency needs. So that is sort of where we fall into place. (Interview with N. Martell, 2013)

Communication is an integral part of FCSS. To this point, we have explored the value of communication in building trust, in helping people to feel included, in supporting strong groups and networks and in advancing collective action. Grootaert & van Bastelaer (2001) indicate that

strong social capital requires investment in much the same way as physical capital – communication is one of those investment strategies.

Information and Communication:

(Narrator)

Information and communication is the final dimension of social capital as outlined by the World Bank. Effective communication can break down negative social capital, and at the same time, build trust and cohesion.

Robert Putnam refers to the experience of seeking employment and recruiting employees to describe how the ability to share information and communicate within a strong social network can lead to success. People with a strong social network have been shown to be more successful in finding work by talking with their friends, relatives and neighbours than those that simply rely on ads or postings.

Especially in ethnic communities, Putnam suggests that employers rely on employees to recruit and train new workers. Among people that trust one another, word of mouth can go a long way when recruiting to a company.

In studies conducted in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, researchers found that differences in the social capital of individuals and families impacted their ability to recover from the disaster – which included their access to information.

(Cameron)

The impacts of **good** communication and information aren't as evident as the impacts on people when communication and information are **poor**. As an example, we simply need to think about the impact that information, or lack of information, has on people affected by disasters. Simply 'not knowing' adds considerable stress – not knowing where loved ones are, whether pets are safe, the condition of one's home in the aftermath of a disaster, or not knowing how and where to access supports and relief creates anxiety.

Trust becomes an important factor in these emergency situations, and communication can have a significant impact on the way people feel. Similarly, people can feel these levels of stress and anxiety as a result of personal challenges – the ability to establish trust and to communicate effectively every day is important to FCSS.

There were three communications themes that emerged from the surveys administered for this project.

The first is that FCSS is an information broker for community members. Especially in rural communities, people seeking support or information about the community often turn to their local FCSS – and FCSS offices make it their business to know – or to find out.

The second theme is around the way FCSS has become an information repository for program

design and best practices. This role is greatly enhanced by the groups and networks that FCSS supports and that they belong to. As our social environment becomes increasingly complex, FCSS programs are increasingly aware of their need to be current on best practices and trends in the industry.

Finally, I was particularly interested in the concept brought forward around FCSS as a community 'translator'.

(N. Martell)

I just found that it is difficult for some people to understand the language of other organizations. So, if somebody has a form to fill out, or if they are trying to understand something, or to get something done through the government it's not easy for them to understand what the government needs or their agency needs. So that is sort of where we fall into place.

(Cameron) Nell indicated the language barriers can sometimes be related to English comprehension, but often it has to do with barriers that we create through the use of jargon or acronyms.

(N. Martell)

We work with tons of different organizations, so some of the organizations that I get to work with are like DSS and ESS and PDD, and CFSA, and I understand what all of these acronyms stand for and I understand the acronyms that they use in order to communicate with the general public. Again, I think that is one of my key roles as FCSS is that understanding of what these large organizations need and being able to funnel that down to the basic community members and help them understand what the corporate or businesses need.

(Cameron)

Related to this concept of FCSS as a community translator, it is important to acknowledge that our language constantly changes. In the housing world, terms like episodic and chronic homelessness are used; we tend to attach labels to people in an attempt to categorize or make sense of our world through illnesses and experiences, and these habits can certainly impact the way we approach situations.

As FCSS often stands at the crossroads of community members, elected officials and human service organizations, there are many situations that require translation. Everyone wants to communicate effectively, but not everyone shares the same language or words to describe their perspectives.

(Narrator)

Whether FCSS is seeking to build or maintain trust, welcome and include people, support groups and networks, or facilitate action among Albertans, communication is a critical factor in building strong social capital.

Information and Communication is the fifth dimension of social capital as outlined by the World Bank. The exploration of FCSS through the lens of the World Bank framework has resulted in a number of findings and observations.

Discussion

This project set out to achieve three objectives: to identify characteristics of a strong social fabric, to highlight ways in which FCSS has influenced these characteristics in Alberta, and to inform and enlighten FCSS practitioners and stakeholders by connecting the characteristics of a strong social fabric to the work of FCSS in Alberta. In this discussion section, I will reflect on these objectives by providing some key observations and some thoughts about opportunities for FCSS to further influence Alberta's social fabric.

The first objective for this project was to determine an appropriate proxy for the concept of social fabric as the theory itself did not appear in the literature. A number of theories were explored including social infrastructure, social cohesion, and community development. It was the work of Robert Putnam that began to provide a framework for this project through his analysis of social capital in America. Further research and exploration led to the World Bank and its articulation of the implementation framework for their social capital initiative (World Bank, 2011, p.2). The framework was comprehensive, consistent with other literature on social capital, was well researched in its own right, and captured the breadth of the topic quite succinctly. The framework includes five dimensions of social capital:

- Trust
- Social Cohesion and Inclusion
- Groups and Networks
- Collective Action and Cooperation
- Information and Communication

The methodology employed to test the manner in which FCSS has influenced the characteristics listed above included a survey made available to every FCSS program in Alberta

and a selection of interviewees from the survey respondents. Data for the highlights in the video and this companion document have come primarily from those two sources. This information has led me to the following conclusions:

1. There are positive examples within the current FCSS program in Alberta that align with all five dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank.
2. The provincial outcome statements that guide the work of FCSS in Alberta are aligned with all five dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank.
3. There is evidence to support that FCSS, through its affiliation with a variety of groups and networks, has influenced Alberta's social fabric.

The limitations for my conclusions are discussed within the rationale provided for each.

1. There are positive examples within the current FCSS program in Alberta that align with all five dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank.

Consistent with the data provided in the Statistical Findings section, when asked about the extent to which FCSS programs influenced each of the five dimensions of social capital, survey respondents were encouraged to assign a rating that varied from "A lot" to "Very little". In all cases, ratings were either "Some" or "A lot", with the exception of one respondent that replied "Not sure" for three questions. Respondents were then asked to provide examples that corresponded with their rating. The qualitative descriptions provided by the respondents were then reviewed and used in the process of determining a group of project participants from those consenting to participate further in the project. Eleven project participants were selected.

The examples described in the video and expanded upon in the companion document are evidence that FCSS is able to deliver on each of the five dimensions of social capital. This is not to suggest that all FCSS programs deliver on all dimensions of social capital, or even that each

FCSS program delivers on any one of the dimensions at all times, simply that positive examples do exist. It is reasonable to believe, however, that the variation in community populations (Figure 1) and geographic distribution (Figure 2) of the survey respondents provides a good cross-representation of FCSS programs in Alberta. In total, 34 of 206 FCSS programs voluntarily completed the survey.

While the stories and examples in the video represent a select few, the survey responses provide additional evidence of FCSS programs working in the five dimensions of social capital.

2. The provincial outcome statements that guide the work of FCSS in Alberta are aligned with all five dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank.

The scope of this project was not designed to measure the extent to which all FCSS programs influence Alberta's social fabric, but the World Bank's implementation framework (World Bank, 2011, p.1) does provide a basis to compare with Alberta's FCSS outcomes (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2010, p.1)(Figure 5).

FCSS Provincial Outcomes	World Bank dimensions of social capital				
	Trust	Social Cohesion and Inclusion	Groups and Networks	Collective Action and Cooperation	Information and Communication
Help people to develop independence, strengthen coping skills and become more resistant to crisis	✓	✓			✓
Help people to develop an awareness of social needs				✓	✓
Help people to develop interpersonal and group skills which enhance constructive relationships among people	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Help people and communities to assume responsibility for decisions and actions which affect them	✓		✓	✓	✓
Provide supports that help sustain people as active participants in the community	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 5 – Comparison of FCSS Outcomes and World Bank dimensions of social capital

The FCSS provincial outcomes contain language and characteristics consistent with the literature in each of the dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank. The outcomes specifically address *people*, wherein individuals are central to the composition of families and communities, and which is consistent with the concept of Hamilton’s (2008) nested holarchy described in the introduction. The FCSS prevention mandate requires that programs enhance “the social well-being of individuals and families through promotion or intervention strategies provided at the earliest convenience” (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2010, p.1).

Further, it should be noted that each of the FCSS provincial outcomes contain the word *help*. This word does not preclude FCSS programs from assuming leadership roles or taking

responsibility, but it does imply that FCSS is intended to support, assist or facilitate individuals, families and communities in enhancing their social well-being. As a result of this word, FCSS is rarely front and centre on major issues in Alberta. Rather, FCSS can often be found in the background creating the conditions for individuals, families and communities to be active participants in addressing social needs that affect them.

Putnam indicates that “social capital refers to networks of social connection – doing *with*. Doing good, *for* other people, however laudable, is not part of the *definition* of social capital” (2001, p.117). The very essence of social capital is grounded in people having trust and connections with others. FCSS is positioned to support this through the provincial outcomes and therefore, the FCSS structure and framework might be considered a ‘social capital asset’ in Alberta as described by the World Bank.

The key attribute of capital, however, is that it is an accumulated stock from which a stream of benefits flows. The view that social capital is an asset—that is, that it represents genuine capital—means that it is more than just a set of social organizations or social values. On the input side this additional dimension lies in the investment required to create a lasting asset; on the output side it lies in the resulting ability to generate a stream of benefits. (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.8)

Whereas numerous other programs and services have come and gone since the mid-1960's, FCSS has endured. Perhaps FCSS represents genuine capital as described by Grootaert and van Bastelaer; genuine capital that exists in virtually every community in Alberta. While this may be the case, this project was not designed to determine whether FCSS represents genuine capital as described by Grootaert and van Bastelaer and the World Bank. The project, however, does begin

to articulate some of the influences that FCSS has on Alberta's social fabric as a stream of benefits and possibly therefore a social capital asset.

3. There is evidence to support that FCSS, through its affiliation with a variety of groups and networks, has influenced Alberta's social fabric.

Alberta has, and continues to face, significant social issues such as homelessness, poverty, and the effects of mental illness, addictions and domestic violence. As a preventive social service, FCSS has always been faced with the difficulty of measuring that which hasn't happened. Speculating as to the condition of Alberta's individuals, families and communities without FCSS would simply be conjecture. "Like human capital, social capital is difficult, if not impossible, to measure directly; for empirical purposes the use of proxy indicators is necessary" (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p.9). While FCSS has been aggressively seeking outcome measures to determine the extent to which it is having an impact on individuals, families and communities, there may also be opportunities to examine impacts resulting from relationships between communities.

This project demonstrates at least two examples of collective action that have been influenced by the relationships and cooperation between FCSS programs. The Emergency Social Services Network of Alberta (ESSNA) and the 7-Cities on Housing and Homelessness are networks that exist as a result of the *help* provided by FCSS. The support provided to Albertans evacuated during the 2011 wildfires in Slave Lake and Northern Alberta, and the 2013 floods in Southern Alberta can be directly traced back to individual FCSS programs and the collaborative network that exists between FCSS directors. Similarly, the roots of Alberta's leadership in ending homelessness involved FCSS people at both local and provincial levels. Rarely does

FCSS step forward to accept responsibility for their role in laying the groundwork once new groups have been empowered.

Other examples await deeper exploration including the FCSS role in poverty reduction, the establishment of ParentLink Centres, supports for out of school childcare, and domestic violence initiatives to name but a few.

FCSS rarely acts alone. The provincial mandate and outcomes for FCSS have created the collaborative culture that entices FCSS programs to bring people together. While ESSNA primarily involves FCSS staff, it also includes city staff from emergency management departments and provincial representatives from a variety of ministries. Similarly, 7-Cities has grown from its early years wherein FCSS directors donned new hats to support local homelessness efforts, to the current situation that includes staff from departments that also deliver FCSS, community foundations, and organizations formed specifically to address housing and homelessness. This is consistent with the mandate to *help* and empower others to assume responsibility.

Opportunities

Project participants were asked to identify ways in which FCSS might improve its ability to influence social capital. While there were a number of suggestions and observations, three observations emerged from the data that create opportunities for FCSS in Alberta:

- 1. FCSS programs appear to be more successful with *bonding* social capital than *bridging* social capital.**

“Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40” (Putnam, 2001, 23). While the survey tool used in this project is far from conclusive, the variance between responses for the questions pertaining to

bonding and *bridging* social capital is rather significant. The research in this area suggests that both *bonding* and *bridging* social capital are necessary. If FCSS, as a community resource, isn't mindful of the importance of or processes associated with connecting people across different ethnicities, income levels, interests or other demographic characteristics, communities may be at risk of increased tensions due to silos or lack of compassion and understanding for one another.

There may be a number of explanations for the variance between these questions. The opportunity for FCSS rests in the manner in which this variance is explored. At least three FCSS provincial outcomes address the extent to which people associate with one another, engage in constructive relationships, assume responsibility for decisions and actions which affect them, and sustain people as active participants in the community (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2010, p.1). Putnam (2001) notes that “bonding and bridging are not “either-or” categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but “more or less” dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital” (p.23).

2. FCSS programs struggle with their ability to communicate with all community members – some populations continue to be difficult to reach.

Thou shalt not distort, delay, or withhold information. You can drive a system crazy by muddying its information streams. You can make a system work better with surprising ease if you can give it more timely, more accurate, more complete information.

(Meadows, 2008, p.173)

From a systems perspective, there is an opportunity for FCSS programs to explore the topic of information flows rather than marketing tips and tricks. While advertising and promotions can be well-designed to get information out, community building requires information flows in two directions. Community members engaged in social change initiatives

need to know if and whether their efforts are having any impacts – feedback needs to flow in multiple directions and with some regularity; “missing information flows is one of the most common causes of system malfunction” (Meadows, 2008, p.157).

I would suggest that data collected in the surveys wasn't necessarily focused on systems information loops. The opportunity, however, exists in being able to acknowledge a trend within the responses and to begin a conversation that goes deeper into the symptoms and conditions that lead to the comments.

3. There is a need to better understand and articulate the impact that FCSS is having in Alberta.

The lack of academic research on the topic of FCSS was a significant motivation for me to pursue a graduate degree, and to maintain a focus on this program throughout my studies. Family and Community Support Services have operated as a provincial/municipal partnership in Alberta since 1966, yet there is virtually nothing about the program in the academic libraries across the country. If this project serves to inspire deeper exploration of FCSS, or serve as a catalyst for greater analysis of the program design and operation, then I will have achieved a personal objective to bring greater awareness to the program.

There is very interesting work coming out of the University of Waterloo, under the vision and guidance of Frances Westley and *Social Innovation Generation*. The following description of social innovation has potential for FCSS in Alberta, as the structure and capacity exists given the present mandate and breadth of the program:

Social innovation is needed to build social and ecological resilience in the face of mounting complex challenges to our economic, social, political and cultural institutions.

Intractable problems are not new, but their interconnection in the context of global

systems is presenting a new level of urgency and uncertainty. Building capacity at local, regional, national and international levels for not only new inventions and creativity in the social arena but also for system transformation can build resilience in the face of this uncertainty. (Westley, 2008, p.8)

Related to the concept of social innovation, is a role or function in community for social entrepreneurs; “just as entrepreneurs change the face of business, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions to change society for the better” (Ashoka, 2013, para.6). FCSS directors in Alberta are well positioned to use their expertise and knowledge of local communities, their social networks, and the social capital built over time to explore alternative solutions to complex issues facing Albertans. “We tend to be the convener, the ones who create the space, for networking to begin. We also provide tangible supports such as facilitation, consultation, etc.” (Online Participant, 2013). While this may not appeal to all, the FCSS environment should encourage exploration and innovation.

(Cameron)

There are limitations to this particular project, and I want to share these before discussing opportunities and my conclusions.

First, the results of this project represent the views of some FCSS programs – not all. Participation in this project was voluntary and was not designed to evaluate the effectiveness of all FCSS programs in meeting the provincial outcome statements.

Second, the influence that FCSS has on Alberta's social fabric has not been achieved in isolation of other contributions – by elected officials, by community groups and organizations, by volunteers and by Albertans in general. There is, however, evidence to demonstrate that FCSS has a unique role to play in shaping Alberta's social fabric.

The World Bank indicates that, not unlike physical, human or financial capital, social capital requires investment. Alberta has been investing in FCSS, and therefore investing in social capital since 1966, and as a result, has built a strong and supportive infrastructure. The ability to

coordinate and facilitate individuals, groups and networks is aligned with the FCSS outcomes - to help people develop awareness, assume responsibility, and to sustain people as active participants in their communities.

Will FCSS end homelessness or reduce poverty? No.

Will FCSS eliminate the need for child protection services or eradicate the effects of mental illness or addiction in Alberta? No.

Is FCSS expected to? According to the provincial outcomes, no.

However, the FCSS provincial outcomes do create the conditions for FCSS to mitigate the effects of these social challenges by building strong social capital in individuals, families, communities...and between communities. Each of the FCSS outcomes position FCSS to help – not to assume responsibility for, or to lead, but to help.

There is a timelessness to these outcomes – they are as relevant now as they were in the 1960s. FCSS is a cornerstone for sustainable social development – the outcomes are designed to help Albertans to address social issues and to support the building blocks of prevention.

Robert Putnam suggests that “social capital refers to networks of social connection – doing *with*. Doing good, *for* other people, however laudable, is not part of the *definition* of social capital” (2001, p.117).

With this in mind, the role that FCSS has in supporting community is consistent with the conditions necessary to build strong social capital. It's a double edged sword – when FCSS is doing things right, and doing the right things, they're not going to be in the limelight – the provincial outcomes actually position FCSS to be in the background...supporting, facilitating and coordinating. It's designed to be subtle.

Are there opportunities for improvement for FCSS in Alberta? Certainly.

Three themes emerged from the surveys and interviews.

First, FCSS programs appear to be more successful with *bonding* social capital than *bridging* social capital. There is a higher degree of comfort and familiarity in bringing people together that have similar backgrounds, interests or issues than those with different interests and backgrounds. This observation certainly deserves greater investigation.

Second, FCSS programs appear to struggle with their ability to communicate with all community members – some populations continue to be difficult to reach. Again, as a theme that emerged from the responses, this observation needs more consideration. This project was not designed to determine the extent to which FCSS reaches all populations, or to compare its effectiveness in communicating as being any better or worse than other organizations. FCSS has an opportunity to dig into this theme a little deeper, and to explore communication within the context of systems information flows – the way information is exchanged so that people engaged in building social

capital know whether they are having any impact.

Finally, a few respondents suggested there is a need to better understand and articulate the impact that FCSS is having in Alberta. There is recognition that the program is unique, yet because of the manner in which it conducts itself, it is still a secret. There are tremendous opportunities in Canada to consider FCSS within the context of emerging discussions about social innovation and social entrepreneurs.

When I started this project, I was inspired by the 2005 FCSSAA Conference Theme – *Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric*, and I was motivated to find out – what do we mean by social fabric?

I started by searching for a theory or academic framework to work from. After reviewing the work of people like Robert Putnam and Jane Jacobs, I discovered the five dimensions of social capital outlined in the implementation framework for the World Bank's social capital initiative. It really seemed to pull together, in a very concise manner, the key topics and theories of other researchers in the field. While there may be other models that would also describe social fabric, the World Bank's model appeared to be comprehensive, consistent with the literature on social capital, and captured the breadth of the topic succinctly.

The characteristics, or dimensions of social capital outlined by the World Bank, include trust, social cohesion and inclusion, groups and networks, collective action and cooperation, and information and communication. Using these dimensions as a lens, my examination of FCSS through surveys and interviews with FCSS Directors led me to the following conclusions:

1. There are many positive examples within the current FCSS program in Alberta that align with all five dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank.
2. The provincial outcome statements that guide the work of FCSS in Alberta are aligned with all five dimensions of social capital as outlined by the World Bank.
3. There is evidence to support that FCSS, on its own and through its affiliation with a variety of groups and networks, has influenced Alberta's social fabric.

Not unlike the quilt, we tend to focus on the topside...the side that everyone sees, and that you show off to your friends and relatives. Underneath, however, that is where you can see how it is all held together...this is FCSS.

The different coloured threads of trust, social cohesion and inclusion, collective action and cooperation, groups and networks, and information and communication... they are threads that hold Alberta's social fabric together. FCSS weaves them together in the same way they help to connect and build relationships among Albertans – one individual, one family and one community at a time. If you have the right equipment, experience and knowledge, there are infinite possibilities for laying out the pieces and patterns of a quilt.

Closing

Alberta's Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) grew out of a rich history of reliance on community and the voluntary sector to deliver human services (Cameron, 2013). FCSS is uniquely Albertan as the provincial/municipal partnership structure and local autonomy that is central to the FCSS program is not found in other provinces in Canada. This makes FCSS distinctively Albertan. While other Canadian jurisdictions have evolved methods of building social capital, FCSS is foundational to the way individuals, families and communities engage with one another in Alberta.

FCSS does not work alone in building social capital – it partners at all levels of government, in community, and among individuals and families to connect people, issues and preventive strategies. The program has always been, and continues to be, a quiet helper. According to the Province of Alberta's FCSS outcomes, it is designed to help; and seldom are helpers acknowledged to the same extent as the leaders. FCSS is designed to be subtle.

I would be remiss to suggest that all FCSS programs meet all dimensions of social capital at all times. Based on the research, however, FCSS can be shown to influence all dimensions of social capital – regardless of community size or location, and therefore plays a significant role in weaving Alberta's social fabric.

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news,
my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers.

You will always find people who are helping" – Mr. Rogers

(Emery, 2013).

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[.pdf](#)

Appendix A

The following message is from Scott Cameron, Red Deer and District FCSS, and Master's candidate through Royal Roads University.

June 17, 2013

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project entitled *Family and Community Support Services (FCSS): Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric* as partial completion of my Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) at Royal Roads University. I will be conducting this research under the supervision of Ian Montgomerie, PhD from Edmonton, Alberta (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

The final form of this research will be a video documentary designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the characteristics of a strong social fabric.
2. To highlight ways in which FCSS has influenced (or not) these characteristics in Alberta, and
3. To inform and enlighten FCSS practitioners and stakeholders by connecting the characteristics of a strong social fabric to the work of FCSS in Alberta.

The attached survey will explore your perceptions of 'social fabric' through the context of five dimensions of social capital as articulated by The World Bank. Upon completion of the survey, you will be asked whether you are interested in further participating in this research through a video interview.

Your participation is strictly voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. As a survey participant only, you will not be required to provide any personal information. Further participation in this research through expressed willingness to participate in an interview will attribute your survey responses to your personal information.

Survey results will be maintained in digital form on my home computer in a password protected file. Confidential access to the raw data will be limited to myself and project supervisors from Royal Roads University that are directly related to this project.

The character of the interview questions will focus on your perceptions and examples that relate to FCSS and its influence on Alberta's social fabric. Neither the survey nor the interview is designed to be controversial or particularly sensitive in nature.

As a professional working in the field of FCSS at the municipal level, I am interested in conducting this research to support the continued improvement and appreciation of this important inter-governmental collaborative program. The final video documentary will be shared freely with municipal, provincial and federal government officials as a basis for understanding the manner in which FCSS influences Alberta's social fabric. Further, as a recipient of provincial government funding available through the bursary administered by the FCSS Association of Alberta (FCSSAA), my final project will be provided to the FCSSAA Board of Directors for information purposes.

Thank you for considering my invitation to participate in this research project. I am available by telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at _____ to answer any questions that you may have prior to consent.

The survey will be open until **June 26, 2013**. To verify your consent to participate, please click on the [I AGREE](#) button below and proceed to the survey.

I AGREE

Appendix B

FCSS: Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric

Project Title:

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS): Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric

Research Objectives:

This project is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- Identify the characteristics of a strong social fabric
- Highlight ways in which Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) has influenced (or not) these characteristics in Alberta, and
- Inform and enlighten FCSS practitioners and stakeholders by connecting the characteristics of a strong social fabric to the work of FCSS in Alberta.

Introduction:

In 2005 the FCSS Association of Alberta (FCSSAA) marked Alberta's centennial through its annual conference theme, Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric. FCSS programs from across Alberta were invited to engage community members and volunteers to create quilts and other fibre arts to honour the centennial. In a news release from the City of Calgary, Alderman Joe Ceci – the FCSSAA Board Chairperson at the time – indicated, "the building blocks of a successful social infrastructure are its people, the contributions they make to their community, and partnerships at all levels" (2005). The concept of a social fabric, the images of quilts and fibre arts, and the reference to elements of a social infrastructure serve as inspiration for this project.

While familiar to people working in FCSS, the concept of 'social fabric' does not appear to have a theoretical basis. This research project, therefore, will be grounded in the theory of social capital. The World Bank identifies five dimensions of social capital to include groups and networks, trust, collective action and cooperation, social cohesion and inclusion, and information and communication (2013, n.p.). These five dimensions provide an outline for the exploration of the 'social fabric' concept, and are abundantly aligned with other literature on social capital.

To determine the extent to which The World Bank's dimensions of social capital fit with your perceptions about FCSS and its influence on Alberta's social fabric, please complete the following five sections of this survey.

At the conclusion of the survey portion, you will be asked whether you wish to conclude your participation or whether you wish to be considered for further participation through a video or audio interview. You retain the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without bias.

References:

- City of Calgary. (2005). Family and community support services association of Alberta conference.
- The City of Calgary Newsroom. The World Bank. (2013). Measuring the dimensions of social capital.

For the purpose of this research, please answer the questions from your perspective as an FCSS Director. The term 'community' therefore, refers to the municipality or region served by your particular FCSS program.

Let’s get started...

A. Trust

When people trust family, friends, strangers and government they build social capital.

- | | A lot | Some | Not sure | Not much | Very little |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by enhancing trust in your community or between communities? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Based on your experience, describe how FCSS enhances trust among family, friends, strangers or government in your community or between communities. | | | | | |

B. Social Cohesion and Inclusion

When people are able to gather:

- a. with people that have similar interests and backgrounds (bonding), and
- b. with people of different interests and backgrounds (bridging),they build social capital.

- | | A lot | Some | Not sure | Not much | Very little |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 3. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by supporting people with SIMILAR interests and backgrounds to connect in your community or between communities? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by supporting people with DIFFERENT interests and backgrounds to connect in your community or between communities? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

- 5. Based on your experience, describe how FCSS supports people to belong and feel included in your community or between communities.

C. Groups and Networks

When people gather and organize in community they build social capital. This includes the concentration and mix of people participating, how they organize and make decisions and the manner in which they connect with other groups and networks.

- | | A lot | Some | Not sure | Not much | Very little |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 6. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by supporting groups and networks in your community or between communities? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

7. Based on your experience, describe how FCSS supports groups and networks in your community or between communities.

D. Collective Action and Cooperation

When people come together to support one another they build social capital. Strong social capital, in turn, makes people want to help in their community.

- | | A lot | Some | Not sure | Not much | Very little |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 8. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by bringing people together to cooperate and take action IN YOUR COMMUNITY? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

- | | A lot | Some | Not sure | Not much | Very little |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 9. To what extent does FCSS build social capital bringing people together to cooperate and take action BETWEEN COMMUNITIES? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

10. Based on your experience, describe how FCSS brings people together to cooperate and take action within or between communities.

E. Information and Communication

When people have access to accurate and timely information, and access to multiple connections of communication, they build social capital.

- | | A
lot | Some | Not
sure | Not
much | Very
little |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 11. To what extent does FCSS build social capital by contributing to good information sharing in your community or between communities? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

12. Based on your experience, describe how FCSS supports people to have good information and effective communication skills in your community or between communities.

F. Other

13. Please use this space to describe ways in which FCSS builds social capital in your community or between communities.

14. Please use this space to describe ways in which FCSS might improve its ability to build social capital in your community or between communities.

G. Community Information

The following information will assist in determining the extent to which responses are representative of the province, and assist in the selection of interview candidates.

15. What is the population of the community that you are referring to in your survey responses?

- Under 1,000
- 1,001 to 5,000
- 5,001 to 10,000
- Over 10,000

16. What FCSSAA region do you belong to?

- South
- Calgary/Bow Valley
- West Central
- East Central
- Edmonton/Evergreen
- Yellowhead
- Northwest
- Northeast
- I'm not sure

I wish to offer my consent to further participate in this research project through an interview.

- Yes
- No

By providing my name and contact information, I acknowledge that: a. my survey responses will be aggregated and not specifically attributed to me, and b. my survey responses are no longer anonymous as they will be used in determining interview candidates.

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Mobile:

To verify the authenticity of this research project, please contact:

Wendy Schissel, PhD, Program Head
MA Interdisciplinary Studies
Faculty of Social & Applied Sciences | Royal Roads University
2005 Sooke Road, Victoria, BC Canada V9B 5Y2 | royalroads.ca
Phone: 250-391-2600

To receive a link to the final video documentary, please click on this email link...

Thank you for participating in this research project.

Appendix C

Interview Request and Consent Form

I wish to offer my consent to further participate in this research project through an interview.

In providing my consent, I agree to the following conditions (please check all that apply):

- 1.1 - I acknowledge that my first name, last name and community or FCSS Program will appear in the final video documentary if my interview material is used.
- 1.2 - I acknowledge that the researcher has the right to edit the interview materials to achieve the research objectives while maintaining the integrity of my comments and the context within which they were provided.
- 1.3 - I acknowledge that the digital files resulting from my interview will be retained in a password protected file by the researcher in his home office.
- 1.4 - I acknowledge that the digital files resulting from my interview will only be accessed by the researcher, project supervisors from Royal Roads University that are directly related to this project, and technical advisors required to ensure the final video documentary is of the highest quality possible.
- 1.5 - I acknowledge that the researcher will retain this consent form and the digital files resulting from my interview until such time as the final project is completed, graded and published in the public domain, at which time the digital files will be deleted.
- 1.6 - I acknowledge that the final video documentary will be used publicly for professional development and education purposes.
- 1.7 - I acknowledge that I have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time and without bias. Upon completion of the interview, withdrawal of my interview data must be made in writing within seven (7) days of the interview.
- 1.8 - In agreeing to the terms and conditions listed above, I confirm my consent by providing the following contact information and signature:

Name:		Email:	
Phone:		Mobile:	
Signature:			
Date:			

Appendix D

Video Consent Form

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS): Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric

My name is Scott Cameron and I am collecting background footage (B-roll) for a video documentary as partial completion of my Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) at Royal Roads University. Verification of this research project may be obtained by contacting:

Wendy Schissel, PhD, Program Head
 MA Interdisciplinary Studies
 Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences - Royal Roads University
 Phone: (250) 391-2600

Images collected will be used to illustrate people building social capital and relationships in communities.

I hereby consent to the collection and use of my personal image(s) by photography or video recording.

- I acknowledge these may be used for the purpose of a video documentary entitled FCSS: Weaving Alberta's Social Fabric
- I understand that no personal information, such as names, will be used in any publications or linked to my particular image.
- I understand that raw footage will only be used for this purpose.
- I understand that no audio recording from the collection of my image(s) will be published.
- I understand that the raw footage collected will be destroyed upon completion of the video documentary. Only footage used in the production of the video will be published.
- I acknowledge these images may be published on YouTube with links to community development websites such as the FCSS Association of Alberta.

To verify my consent, I am providing my first name and last initial.

First name and last initial

First name and last initial of parent or guardian (if participant is under 18 years of age)

Location

Date
 ____/____/____ (YYYY/MM/DD)