

***Empowerment of a Community: Beit Shean Community Builders***

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***Abstract***

The opportunities, challenges, and lessons of a community development program are conceptualized and presented in this paper. This paper looks at how the Beit Shean Community was able to foster community development through empowerment in order to gain knowledge; this knowledge can be applied to future policy makers that wish to go through a community development and either lack the funds necessary to recruit outside leaders or wish to use local community members in the development of their community. I show that the different components used in the Beit Shean Community Builders program (course, practicum and guidance) led to a stronger feeling of self-efficacy, needed to enhanced the empowerment process and attain enhanced community development.

## ***Introduction***

The opportunities, challenges, and lessons of a community development program are presented and conceptualized in this paper. The program takes place in the city of Beit Shean, as well as in the surrounding Beit Shean valley region, consisting of suburban *moshavim* and rural *kibbutzim*. I aim to understand the elements of the Community Builders Project in order to qualify any elements that lead to empowerment of individuals to better the community. The topic of empowering individuals to engage in community development is a topic that has been explored; however, I aim to look at it in a different light. Particularly, I am looking at empowerment in a broader community sense, and am looking at a tangible, concrete and easily repeatable program to understand concepts that could be applied to other communities and situations.

Community development allows for a utilization of potentially untapped existing strengths, assets, and capacities of individuals in the community (Boothroyd, Fawcett and Foster-Fishman, 2004). When a community would like to engage in community development activities, there are often two main ways to go about creating a solution to problems in the community: apply a top-down leadership style, initiated by government intervention or outside leadership; or apply bottom-up elements of grass-roots social change by extracting leadership from within the community.

When using external people it may be easier to locate already skilled individuals, however, the recruitment costs, including potential relocation costs, of such people may be high. On the other hand finding capable individuals in the community may be more difficult in a smaller pool of already skilled individuals in the community, may require the education and

training of the individuals which would lead to a lengthier time to show results. Further, it is unclear which of the choices would yield better results.

This paper explores the latter choice / style of a community development by exploring the case of the Community Builders Project in the city Beit Shean, where the city has attempted over the last eight years to empower its citizen. The paper builds on prior research (such as Conger and Kanungo (1988), Bandura (1977), Walton (1985), and Thomas and Velthouse (1990)) exploring the literature on empowerment, as it relates to motivation and self-efficacy and to community development. By reviewing the prior work on empowerment, I propose that some components may lead to a more desirable outcome of community development if a community chooses to go through the route of using its own individuals to lead the development process.

Beit Shean's main communal issues are economic and employment problems, which lead to a lower quality of life for the citizens. In addition the community also has a lack of unity within the city of Beit Shean and its neighboring regional community. Like other cities in Israel, the community also suffers from security threats and problems. These problems faced by Beit Shean residents result in many of its younger citizens choosing not to return to the city after their compulsory army service. In the past eight years, in order to deal with these issues, the Beit Shean has attempted to empower its educators, civic, business and professional leaders through its volunteer leadership development course, the Community Builders Project.

The Community Builders Project is a multi-year program that trains course participants through a model of community empowerment. The goal is to engage the community's existing leaders by developing their skills and vision to make large-scale community impacts. Participants engage in a year of fundamental management and leadership classes and then spend the following half-year developing projects for needs they identify in the Beit Shean region.

Developing, designing and implementing these projects hone their skills by taking the theoretical classes to the next level of social action, civic engagement and community responsibility.

The findings highlight the importance of an educational component in a leadership course, as well as the added value of continued support and training after participants have finished the program. The combination of an educational course, practicum and project implementation helped to achieve the community development goal and attain the much-needed results of empowerment.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Theory and Literature Review***

#### *Community Development and Change*

In an effort to understand the program's impact on the community, theory on community development and empowerment was consulted and applied towards this research. While *community development* and *community change* are related concepts, differences exist. Boothroyd, Fawcett and Foster-Fishman (2004) define *community development* as a process that "involves people who share a common place or experience working together to bring about community improvements that matter to them." A similar but alternate definition is that of Jakubowski and Burman (2004): "a process that is designed to promote collaboration in decision-making so that individuals can, in meaningful ways, influence decisions that affect their lives." Thus, community development focuses on the actual change process.

Community *change* is defined as "citizen participation in organizations which attempt to influence public policy, taking an active or leadership role in a voluntary organization, or even

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<sup>1</sup> Given the short time of the existence of the program it is hard to predict how long these effects would be maintained, and whether these positive effects will continue with less or no continued city funding.

the simple belief that taking action is an effective means to influence community decisions (Schulz, Israel, Zimmerman and Checkoway; 1994).” Thus, one could understand the relationship between community development and change as follows: community development is the larger, more advanced process, which allows for the *actions* of community change to occur.

From a practical perspective, community *development* research suggests three basic requirements for the successful *change* to occur: appropriate definitions of the problem, the capacity and willingness to address them, and a vision of what could be (Fiol and O’Connor, 2002). Ideal community building efforts are aimed at helping the entire society find new, better, more effective ways of caring for its’ fellow citizens needs — neighbor helping neighbor. Thus, in order to find a beneficial way to enhance a community’s social services, one must identify the unmet needs of its citizens, have the appropriate tools that will help the citizens’ address their own needs, and enact a plan that could carry out such activities.

Titterton and Smart (2008) examined the potential of participatory research in attempting to empower communities and found their own host of requirements they felt were needed for implementation of community development, including:

*“Genuine involvement of community members from start to finish within a realistic time frame, early discussion and inclusive planning, regular consultation and feedback, open and shared agendas, training to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills and a willingness to take on board community perceptions and to rethink initial preconceptions about a community and its concern.”*

### *Empowerment*

While community *empowerment* is central to (and often needed for) community

*development*, and yet it remains difficult to quantify. Empowerment in organizations and in communities will be looking at here separately, even though what is learned from one situation could also be utilized in another.

In Argyris and Schon (1978)'s study, they found that the current environment of an organization allowed for only management to exercise decision-making power and authority; however there was a feeling from employees that they also wanted more input into organizational decision-making. These employees lacked a feeling of control and authority and truly wanted to feel empowered in their job functions and duties.

In looking at empowerment of employees in an organization, we see that "employee participation and shared responsibility for decisions lead to more effective organizational functioning (Bartunek and Moch, 1987)." As employees feel a greater sense of ownership of their activities in an organization, their efficiency and commitment tends to increase. For most empowerment efforts to succeed, managers and employees must transform their beliefs about who exercises influence in the organization. Specifically, decision-making influence will now be shared among individuals who are otherwise hierarchical un-equals (Labianca, Gray, and Brass, 2000). Because this process often involves radical change in the beliefs and values of organizational members, such empowerment efforts typically require a second-order change in the decision-making schema (Bartunek and Moch 1987).

Labianca, Gray and Brass (2000), take the more traditional approach of understanding empowerment in terms of relative decision-making power in the organization. They continue further to understand that empowerment involves the development of a shared organizational schema for how decisions are made in an organization – specifically that organizational decision-making can and will be shared among those who are considered hierarchically unequal.

In the sense of empowering citizens in a community, Titterton and Smart (2008) define *community empowerment* as “the process by which socially excluded or marginalized groups are given a greater voice in matters that affect their lives.” These groups of citizens who may have otherwise not engaged or involved themselves in civic affairs are thus motivated to take an active role.

### *Empowerment and Self-Efficacy*

Much research on empowerment includes the importance of *self-efficacy*. Conger and Kanungo (1988) argue that actions that lead to self-efficacy are actions that enable individuals to feel they can perform their work competently. Other such as Bandura (1977) argue that self-efficacy is an estimate of one's ability to orchestrate performance through successfully executing the behaviors that are required to produce desired outcomes.

An individual's judgment of self-efficacy influences the initiation, intensity, and persistence of behavior. If one feels that he is not capable of the task at hand, he is less likely to get involved; people get involved in activities that they judge themselves capable of handling. Once engaged, their efficacy beliefs influence how much effort they devote to the task and how long they persist in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1977). In an organization, employee self-efficacy often leads to increased effectiveness. In regards to a community development program, group member's self-efficacy allows them to feel they can create meaningful programs and activities on their own.

Since empowerment can be defined as giving power to another person, specifically giving over authority, capacity and energy, Tomas and Velthouse, (1990) explain that energy

captures the motivational aspect of empowerment.<sup>2</sup> Motivation “engenders a sense of energy and enthusiasm among employees, and, over time, their satisfaction [will] become tied to the accomplishment of group goals” (House & Podsakoff, 1994). Thus, the connection between empowerment and motivation is that empowerment encourages commitment, risk-taking and innovation on the parts of the empowered (Walton, 1985).

Thomas and Velthouse focus their research on the *motivating* characteristics of empowerment, particularly *intrinsic task motivation*. Intrinsic task motivation involves positively valued experiences that individuals derive directly from a task and more importantly satisfaction that arises from completing the task. The authors go on to define four necessary components for successful task motivation: sense of impact, competence, choice and meaningfulness. Sense of impact in this situation refers to the need of participants to feel that their actions will actually make a difference. Competence here means that participants themselves have the tools and knowledge to successfully complete the task. Choice refers to the need of participants to feel that they are able to choose what projects and activities personally interest them. Meaningfulness is the component that may have the greatest impact on self-efficacy.

Hackman and Oldham (1980) agreed with Thomas and Velthouse’s third necessary component for successful motivation: meaningfulness; they felt that a sense of meaningful purposefulness in the task would be a motivator for task motivating activities. If a person feels his actions will produce a meaningful positive result, he is more likely to remain motivated in job activity. This personal, subjective feeling of meaningfulness is important to note: Thomas and Velthouse (1990) view “such judgments as subjective interpretations of reality, so that task assessments are also influenced by individual differences in interpretive process (p. 667).”

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<sup>2</sup> There is an extensive amount of literature focusing on motivation however this literature review will focus only on the link between empowerment and motivation.

### *Resistance to Change & Barriers to Empowerment*

As with any change management project, there are often many resistances to change, and as such this is discussed in much of research literature. Different theories for resistances to change are organizational politics and different cultural norms. In addition, people in different groups (socio-economic, racial, ethnic, religious, etc.) often see what is apparently the same event very differently (Meyerson and Martin, 1987), and thus approach what is needed for the community very differently and as such these differences among groups can be a source of conflict in change in organizational schemas (Bartunek, 1984).

Other barriers could include emotional and pre-disposed ideas and thoughts. In Labianca, Gray, and Brass (2000)'s research study, they analyzed a two-year organizational development project involving redesign of a health care organization's structure, team building, and increased participation of lower-level employees in decision-making. In their research, they found that management's attempts to include workers were met with so much skepticism. This cognitive resistance and associated emotional and behaviors were referred to as "barriers" to empowerment.

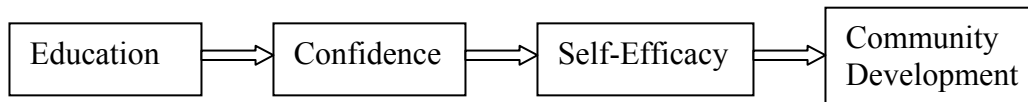
From the literature above, it stands to reason that in order to reach better performance (community development) resulting from empowerment, policy makers need to emphasize the feeling of self-efficacy, i.e. policy makers should focus on means of enhancing the empowered individual feeling of self-efficacy. Hence I propose:

*Proposition 1: Components of the project (Education, Practicum and Guidance) lead to stronger feelings of self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy is a combination of competence and confidence about one's own competence.

Hence

*Proposition 2: Components of the project (Education, Practicum and Guidance) enhance the ability to empower individuals by improving their confidence and skills.*



### ***Data & Methods***

In an effort to make the research findings more universal, I will identify specific elements of the program that enabled empowerment and success. For the research process, data came largely from discussion with the program's administrators, as well as from participant accounts (drawn from personal interviews and written evaluation of their experiences). An invaluable help, a large amount of data analyzed was collected by Malka Korazin on an evaluation study of the 2005/2006 Community Builder's training course, projects and graduate activities.

As part of the course's 2005/2006 evaluations, data was collected from the participants at two points in time, midway through the course and after course completion.

- *Midway through the course* (at the start of the practicum, after completion of the theoretical component) - a questionnaire was distributed to the participants to examine their views thus far of the course's contributions. All 13 participants completed the questionnaires in August 2006.
- *Course completion* – the participants were interviewed using a semi-private questionnaire on their views of the practicum phase of their program. The interviews were conducted by telephone in February-March 2007 with 12 out of the 13 participants participating.

## ***The Context of this Research***

### *Community Builders Project Objectives*

The overall goal of the Community Builders Project is to contribute to the development of the Beit Shean region by promoting civic leadership as a force for improvement and change.

The specific objectives are:

- To create a cadre of individuals with enhanced leadership skills and motivation that can play active roles in improving their communities
- To allow for a venue for participants to create projects based on their own motivations and plans.

### *Group selection and characteristics*

The timeline for the project starts with approximately 3 months of recruitment. During the recruitment phase, between 50-80 applicants are interviewed and between 12-20 participants are chosen. Oshrat Barel, the program director of the Community Builders, said that the staff looks for people who “show social responsibility, involvement in the community, ability to work in groups, academic backgrounds, and readiness for the program’s course of study.”

Each year during selectino, an effort is made to make the group diverse. Participants backgrounds tend differ considerably: some come from urban Beit Shean, while others lives in the agricultural *Kibbutzim* and local *Moshavim* of the region. Some participants are religious, while others are secular, and the ages of the participants range between 30 and 50. The program’s administrators jokingly commented that this is the only group in the area where the requirement is *diversity*: where they live, age, profession, educational level and background.

Upon looking at the application forms filled out by the 2005/2006 participants prior to their entrance in the program, one sees just how diverse the characteristics of the 13 participants

are. The overwhelming majority (10) of the participants were women; their ages ranged between 29 and 46, with most (8) between the ages of 30—37; roughly half of the participants were from the city of Beit Shean, while the remaining half were from localities in the Beit Shean Valley Regional Council. Regarding education levels, the group was diverse; five had just high school education, four reported some type of post-high school education and four had a post-high school academic degree.

The only common characteristic between Community Builders Project participants tends to be a background in volunteer activities. As a result of the heterogeneousness of the group, the group has a unique advantage in successfully creating a panel for planning, deliberating and developing projects necessary for the different groups represented in the regional community.

#### *Community Builders Project Timeline and Stages*

The Community Builders Project spans 1.5 years, however the hope is that graduates of the program will be involved in their respective project and “community building activities” for years after. The timeline is roughly as follows:

- November - January: Vision and Leadership
- February: Skills development and preparation for the practicum
- March-July: Practicum – Involvement in specific activities of the hosting organizations
- August-September: Continuation of activities independently
- September - Oct: A visit to Cleveland (Partnership 2000 sister-city)
- November-December: Closing sessions of educational component
- December – March (and longer): Development of personal projects

The project is divided in three main stages; a description of each stage is presented, followed by an evaluation of each component by program participants.

### Stage One: Theoretical

The *first stage* includes lectures, workshops and presentations about the non-profit sector, civil society, impact-oriented social involvement, and volunteerism. Participants are exposed to models of formative leadership as well as educational theory such as the GANT and PERT planning systems. These planning systems allow for a formative approach for planning program timelines and constraints.

Participants are taught how to consolidate vision and ideology into practical terms, and are familiarized with organizational culture, the decision-making processes, time management techniques, project planning, presentation skills, volunteer management, and fundraising techniques. In addition, a large emphasis is placed on acquainting the Community Builders Project participants with local elected officials and municipal structure.

Midway through the course, the participants were asked to evaluate the theoretical component of the course. As part of the evaluation, a number of aspects related to the contributions of this component of the course were examined. Table 1.1 displays participants' evaluation of the overall theoretical portion of the program.

**Table 1.1: Participants evaluation of theoretical portion of Community Builder's Program**

<b>Category</b>		<i>To a very great Extent (4)</i>	<i>To a great Extent (3)</i>	<i>To a small Extent (2)</i>	<i>Average</i>
<i>Planning and Implementation of projects</i>					
“Has given me new knowledge on implementing community projects”	<b>13</b>	4	7	2	3.2
“Has given me new skills in project planning”	<b>13</b>	3	9	1	3.2
<i>Community Leadership</i>					
“Has given me new knowledge in the area of community leadership”	<b>13</b>	5	7	1	3.3
“Has given me new tools in the area of community leadership”	<b>13</b>	-	12	1	2.9
<i>General Leadership Skills</i>					
“Has enabled me to explore my leadership skills”	<b>13</b>	3	6	4	2.9
“Has reinforced my confidence in my leadership skills”	<b>13</b>	3	7	3	3.0

During the theoretical portion, participants took part in a total of 16 different educational sessions. Participants was asked to rate the personal relevance for them of all the sessions which took place in the course on a scale of 4, with 1 being the lowest (not at all), and 4 being the highest (to a very great extent); the finding are displayed in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: Participants' Assessment of the Degree of Relevance of the Sessions in the Course**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>To a very great extent (4)</i>	<i>To a great Extent (3)</i>	<i>To a lesser Extent (2)</i>	<i>Average</i>
1. The Outdoor Seminar	13	10	2	1	3.7
2. Open session on "Volunteers Can Not Be Taken for Granted"	12	8	4	-	3.7
3. Creative and strategic thinking	13	8	4	-	3.7
4 Improving presentation skills	11	7	4	-	3.6
5. Constructing a work plan and GANT flowchart	12	7	4	1	3.5
6. Social involvement	13	5	6	2	3.2
7. Writing a group vision	13	5	6	1	3.2
8. Steps in problem analysis	13	4	7	2	3.2
9. Fund raising	12	4	7	-	3.2
10. Social planning	12	3	7	2	3.1
11. Goals in planning	10	3	5	2	3.1
12. Ways of achieving goals	13	3	8	2	3.1
13. Choosing the preferred strategy and setting parameters for success	12	3	7	2	3.1
14. Leaders in Judaism	11	3	4	4	2.9
15. Sessions with the heads of social service departments	13	2	5	5	2.6
16. Sessions with heads of regional councils and mayors	13	-	5	6	2.2

\*The fourth category—"not at all," was not chosen by any of the participants.

The five highest ranking sessions were the team-building "Outdoor Seminar" (average ranking of 3.7); "The Volunteer Can Not be Taken for Granted" (3.7), "Creative and Strategic Thinking" (3.7); "Improving Presentation Skills" (3.6); and "Building a Work Plan and GANT

flowchart” (3.5). By focusing on the various positively ranked sessions, one who is interested in introducing a similar program can focus on similar session topics or content areas.

Interestingly, it was found that in all the sessions, the participants who had studied in high school and in post-high school programs rated the relevance as greater than those with an academic education. Perhaps this is an indication that for participants to connect to educational programming it must be appropriate to their educational and life-experiences background.

### *Suggestions for Improvement*

In evaluation of the theoretical component, participants were also asked if they had any suggestions for improvement. About half (6) of the participants made suggestions for improvement. Suggestions included:

- More group encounters to promote group integration and cohesion (4)
- Improve timing of the sessions
- Setting the practicum experience at an earlier stage of the overall program
- Increase lectures by outside lecturers as opposed to the regular administrative staff
- Integration of professionals who will accompany the initial stages of the practicum

### *Stage Two: Practicum*

The *second stage* of the course involves integration of Community Builders Project participants into existing community development projects, in a type of “practicum” project, under the supervision and professional guidance of the course staff. The practicum phase helps participants acquire tools for identifying community dilemmas and developing suitable community projects to address those issues. Skills learned during this phase include creative thinking, program planning, and resource development. By completing the practicum first,

participants learn more their own organizational abilities and leadership style, while also gaining confidence before working on their own initiatives.

### *Practicum Choices*

During the 2005/2006 year, there were four practicum choices:

- Timeout – a project implemented at two schools, which consisted of creating a room to which children who misbehave would be sent by their teachers to calm down for a while during the class period. The room was to be operated by parents on a voluntary basis (4 participants);
- Parents' Patrol – a project to develop a patrol service operated by volunteer parents to help youngsters get home safely at the end of a night out (4 participants);
- Ezrat Nashim – a project offering workshops and leisure activities for widows and bereaved parents to help them to cope with their loss (2 participants);
- Integration – a project addressing the social and learning gaps between children from *moshavim* and those from *kibbutzim* through activities to reinforce cohesion between the two groups (2 participants).

### *Practicum Selection*

The practicum projects were implemented as a group assignment and the topics were self-selected by the participants, in preference of interest. The projects were selected on the basis of discussions among service providers, the local authority, and the participants, during which there was an attempt to match local needs with participants' preferences. The interviewees' descriptions indicate that the selection did not involve a clear and defined process: *"I meant to start a different project that was suggested by the local authority, but I felt that it was too big for such a small number of people, so they suggested that I join another project."*

Participants also mentioned that three out of the four projects were already being implemented in Beit Shean (Ezrat Nashim) or other parts of the country (Timeout and Parents' Patrol); one could gauge from these sentiments that most participants would have rather engaged in more original projects.

**\*\*Project update:** Two of the four practicum projects (Parents' Patrol and Integration) never went past the development stages. Ezrat Nashim was fully realized, and is still a thriving program as of the summer 2008. The Time Out program was one that was worked on for the subsequent 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 Community Builders Project classes as practicum projects; plans are in the works for project implementation in the coming year.

The participants were asked several questions regarding their opinion about the implementation and contributions of the practicum. Participants evaluation of the professional guidance provided during the practicum appear in table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Evaluation of the Professional Guidance provided during the Practicum (by the Practicum organization as well as by Community Builder Course Staff**

	Number of participants
<b>Professional Guidance Provided by the <u>Organization</u></b>	
<i>Extent of professional guidance</i>	<b>12</b>
Sufficient	4
Insufficient	4
Not provided	4
<i>The extent the guidance contributed to project performance</i>	<b>12</b>
Contributed to a very great extent	3
Contributed to a great extent	1
Contributed to some extent	4
Did not contribute at all	--
Not provided	4
<i>The professional level of the professional guidance</i>	<b>12</b>
Very high	1
High	3
Medium	2
Low	1
Very low	1
Not provided	4
<b>Professional Guidance Provided by Course Staff</b>	
<i>Extent of professional guidance</i>	<b>12</b>
Sufficient	8
Insufficient	4
<i>The extent the guidance contributed to project performance</i>	<b>12</b>
Contributed to a very great extent	3
Contributed to a great extent	6
Contributed to some extent	-
Did not contribute at all	3
<i>The professional level of the professional guidance</i>	<b>12</b>
Very high	4
High	5
Medium	-
Low	3
Very low	-

In terms of professional guidance by the respective organization in implementing their practicum projects, about half of participants reported that the amount of guidance received was insufficient and its professional level was mediocre to low. The other half reported that the organization provided sufficient guidance, that their support contributed to the project performance, and that the professional level was high. Analysis of aspects of professional guidance revealed that participants involved in the Parents' Patrol and Integration projects were less satisfied with the assistance received than those involved in the Ezrat Nashim and Time Out projects.

Participants were also asked about the guidance provided by the course staff during the practicum. The level of satisfaction with the assistance of course staff was higher in all aspects than it was with the assistance provided by the organization. Two-thirds of the participants reported that the amount of guidance received was sufficient, that it contributed to project performance and that its professional level was high. About one-third of the participants felt that there was insufficient guidance from course staff and that the professional level was low. Analysis revealed that those who worked on Parents' Patrol were less satisfied with the assistance provided by the staff than those who worked on the other three projects.

The contribution of the practicum was evaluated by two types of question: an open-ended question, in which participants were asked to indicate the two main contributions of the practicum, and two additional questions asking them to rank the contribution of the practicum and their specific project with regard to various aspects (displayed on Table 2.2).

The answers to the open-ended question revealed that the participants reported three main areas of contribution:

- The opportunity to experience the implementation of a community project including involvement in the process of planning a project, dealing with resistance from various sources, understanding the complexity of implementation, and understanding that a project does not always succeed (6 participants).
- The opportunity to be exposed to voluntary activity and community involvement (2 participants).
- Personal satisfaction and confidence (3 participants).

**Table 2.2 Extent of Contribution of the Practicum and the Project Implemented**

<b>The Extent of the Contribution of the Project and the Practicum</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>To a very great extent</b>	<b>To a great extent</b>	<b>To a small extent</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>The project implemented in the practicum:</b>						
Addressed an issue that was needed in the community	12	7	5	--	--	3.6
Was interesting	12	7	4	1	-	3.5
Was a new issue for your community	12	6	4	1	1	3.3
Strengthened your interest in promoting community issues	12	5	3	3	1	3.0
Provided you with an opportunity to deal with a topic that was new for you	12	4	4	1	3	2.8
Provided an opportunity to experience regional cooperation in the Beit Shean region	12	4	2	3	3	2.6
<b>The practicum:</b>						
Provided you with new skills in project planning and implementation	12	5	3	2	2	2.9
Enabled you to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in the course	12	4	2	5	1	2.8
Enabled you to experience the development of a new project	12	3	3	5	1	2.7
Provided you with new tools in the area of community leadership	12	2	5	2	3	2.5

The participants were asked to what degree the practicum had met their expectations. Most of the participants were disappointed with the practicum and indicated that it met few of their expectations (6) or did not meet them at all (3).

### *Suggestions for Improvement*

The participants were asked several questions regarding changes needed in the implementation of the practicum. Most of the participants felt that the timing of the practicum in the course was inappropriate – too late (6) or too early (3) – and that insufficient time was allocated to it (9). Almost all participants (10) indicated that the practicum lacked something and all had suggestions for improvement. The main areas of concern and suggestion for improvement mentioned were:

- Further guidance and follow-up provided by the organization in which the practicum was performed (6)
- The timing of the practicum within the course and the lack of sufficient time for it (5)
- The lack of appropriate follow-up and involvement of the course staff in the implementation process (4)
- The participants' own difficulties committing themselves to the project and to working in a team (3).
- Providing more applied training before the practicum (2)
- Involving graduates from previous courses in the practicum (1)

### *Stage Three: Community Projects*

In the *third stage* of the program, which begins after successful completion of the one year course (including the theoretical and practicum stages), Community Builders Project

participants work on implementation of their respective community projects, stemming from needs they identify in the community.

The educational goals of the community projects phase of the program are: to understand resource development, create a streamlined system for carrying out respective projects, and build a tangible business program. Each class of participants developed several ideas for community initiatives; some ideas were never implemented, some of these projects operated for a limited time, while other projects succeeded and operate even today. These activities have a significant impact on the development of a civil society where people come together in common cause to improve the quality of life the community's residents.

#### Summary of Major Projects (from 2005-2008)

##### *The Ezrat Nashim Women's Support Group (Ezrat Nashim I)*

In recent years, the community of Beit Shean (like many cities in Israel) suffered considerable loss at the hands of terrorism and war; a majority of those lost were men. Thus, a community need arose to care for women who had lost husbands, sons and daughters to war and terrorism (as well as to natural causes). Many of these bereaved women felt that they were not "allowed" to be happy and thus instead of coping, withdrew from the community. This was the impetus for Ezrat Nashim (*helping women*), a social support group for women who have suffered the loss of a loved one. The group recently marked four years of meaningful activities such as workshops, lectures, outings, performances, restaurants, and social gatherings. Currently, Ezrat Nashim is comprised of 22 women and is staffed by 4 volunteer Community Builders, who construct the year-long program and work with the women in the group.

*The Second Ezrat Nashim Women's Support Group (Ezrat Nashim II)*

In light of the success of Ezrat Nashim I and due to a growing need for support of additional bereaved women in the community, a second chapter of the Ezrat Nashim was established based on the same model. The Ezrat Nashim II group is a prime example of what positive empowerment in a community can look like; the Ezrat Nashim II group is staffed by women themselves experienced loss and were helped through the Ezrat Nashim I activities as participants. Through their experiences in Ezrat Nashim I, these women were given the confidence again to take part in social activities. The cycle has continued for the positive as the women are now empowered to lead again in their community by aiding in Ezrat Nashim II.

*MESHUK – The Community Dental Care Program*

The Meshik Community Dental Care program offers dental care free of charge to children who are pre-selected by the local welfare authorities by their socio-economic need. The program is located on the grounds of the dental care clinic at Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu and is staffed by volunteer dental professionals. Now in its fourth year, the program has benefited over 150 children and brings together the children, the social welfare departments, and the clinics.

*ALEH – Business for Community*

This program helps local small-business owners gain practical skills and support in the beginning states of their entrepreneurship endeavors. The necessity and potential that exist in collaborations between the local community and businesses in the region are at the heart of this project. A group of volunteers meets once every two weeks to create a plan of action involving local residents and businesses.

*Orchut (Lifestyles)*

The Orchut project came about after a visible need arose to increase dialogue between Beit Shean residents who come from a spectrum of different racial, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. With the idea that prejudice and alienation in society results from a lack of knowledge about others, a women's dialogue group was formed. The group, which met for one year, was made up of approximately 25 women. The women were made up of both veteran Israelis as well as new immigrants from a multitude of countries. The group focused on informal learning of members' cultural background, traditions, and history to create interpersonal ties, for the purpose of study, enjoyment, and outreach.

*The Pre-Army Service "Emek" Year Program*

The Emek pre-army service program was established and designed to bring together high school graduates (both from Israel as well as the students from the Diaspora wanting to join the Israeli Army) to form a group of young leaders and social entrepreneurs. A Community Builders Project graduate recruited a team that planned the project, raised funds, organized teachers and leaders, accepted program participants, and established the program in Moshav Tel Teomim, (with the support of the local residents and the Beit Shean Valley Regional Council).

*Shorashim (Roots) Theater Group*

This program was the initiative of a Community Builders Project course graduate to address the needs of recent Ethiopian immigrant women in the Beit Shean community. The Shorashim group creates a sense of pride and awareness of the Ethiopian story and culture. This Ethiopian women's theater group presents the story of life in Ethiopia, and the story of immigration, absorption, and life in Israel, based on the personal stories of the women in the group. Members of the group include a varied mix of women, and participants range in age from

grandmothers to a 9 year-old daughter of one of the group members. The group has existed for more than four years and has performed around the country; this allows for greater exposure of the Ethiopian story to other communities in Israel.

#### *Hosting IDF Soldiers*

As a result of the close proximity of the Beit Shean region to a number of Israeli Defense Force bases, the Community Builders group hosts soldiers and cadets from a variety of units as part of the army's community weekend programs. Community Builders Project participants are entirely responsible for planning the agenda, enlisting volunteers for home hospitality, and enlisting volunteers to give tours of the city. While this is not a direct program of the Community Builders Project, it creates a direct link between members of the city and Israeli soldiers, who come from literally all parts of the country. By viewing the Community Builders' organization, leadership and responsibility, the image of the community is enhanced to citizens of greater Israel, which results in heightened community pride.

#### *General Contributions of the Course*

The contributions of the course were examined through three tactics. Firstly, in order to get their overall feelings regarding the course's contribution, the participants were asked to complete the following sentence: "For me the course was". The question elicited a variety of positive definitions – "*a learning experience*," "*a springboard*," "*a new opening*," "*personal learning*," "*an opportunity to learn and experience and meet people whom I would never otherwise meet*," and "*an exciting course*."

Secondly, participants also filled out an overall course evaluation (Table 3.1)

**Table 3.1: Overall evaluation of the Course (in absolute numbers)**

	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b><i>The course was meaningful to you</i></b>	<b>12</b>
To a very great extent	7
To a great extent	5
To a small extent	--
Not at all	--
<b><i>The course contributes to the region</i></b>	<b>12</b>
To a very great extent	5
To a great extent	7
To a small extent	--
Not at all	--

Third, the participants were asked to list the most important elements they received from the course. The responses revealed three main aspects:

- Knowledge, tools, and experience of project development (6)
- New relationships with people from the region (5)
- The opportunity to discover and strengthen leadership skills (3).

Further questions also examined the participants' assessment of the impact of the course on: their views on regional cooperation, leadership skills, and their plans for community involvement (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2: Views on the Impacts of the Course (in absolute numbers)**

<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Participants</b>
<b><i>The course changed your view on regional community cooperation</i></b>	<b>12</b>
To a very great extent	2
To a great extent	6
To a small extent	1
Not at all	3
<b><i>The course changed your plans regarding future involvement in the community</i></b>	<b>12</b>
Yes	8
No	4
<b><i>The course improved your leadership skills</i></b>	<b>12</b>
Yes	10
No	2

## ***Findings***

### ***Impact on Community***

The Community Builders Project works to enable grass-roots change; when residents choose to donate their time and talents to bring about change, this allows for the creation of a framework of influence from bottom to top.

Developing community leadership is built on the idea of utilizing the human capital that exists in the community and empowering community residents in creating change. Each program graduate agrees to take upon himself the task of working on a project that will advance and better the community. This goal translates into action plans to initiate and develop a civil society to enhance the quality of life within the community of the Beit Shean Region. The greatest impact is in the larger scale; each Community Builder attempts to create a worthwhile project for the community and in the doing so they enlist help of friends, family and other community residents in the formulation of these projects.

### Regional cooperation and unity

The majority of the participants reported that the course changed their view on the regional community of Beit Shean to a great extent. In describing the change, most of them related to the fact that the encounter with people from the city and from the region created new relationships and common goals, which reinforced their ability and interest in joint action. Some notes: *"At the beginning I was active only in the city of Beit Shean and the course enabled me to initiate things in the region – outside the city"*; *"Everybody in the region has something to give – we can now join. Many stigmas were removed"*. Those who indicated that the course had not affected their views on the region noted that they had had a positive view on regional cooperation prior to the course.

### Improved Leadership skills

The majority of the participants (10) reported that they had improved their leadership skills. In their descriptions of their newly strengthened leadership, they related to two main issues: acquiring tools for promoting voluntary activities (5) and feeling that they were able to make a difference in what happens in the community (3). Specifically, participants noted in this section that they acquired *"the feeling that I can develop an organization and not only be a volunteer,"* and acquired *"tools for knowing how to volunteer."*

### Senior Citizens Leadership Project

A similar but unrelated community leadership development program for senior citizens was initiated in May 2002 in four community centers in Southern Israel (Merhavim, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Dimona), all chosen as cities whose community centers had no structured activities for retired personnel. The project was aimed at meeting the needs of senior citizens in developing their personal skills to enable them to be established as involved and contributing

citizens to their respective communities. In addition, the aim of this project was to empower older people in the community in order to undertake leadership roles. Over 100 people were recruited for the program, evenly divided up among the four regional community centers. The demographics of the participants showed that participants were overall relatively young (over a third were under 60); 62% of participants had previous experience in leadership roles, while 59% had previous lay-leadership/volunteer roles (Korazim, 2005).

Very similar to the structure of the Beit Shean program, the program was made up of three main components: 1) mobilization of a nucleus of leaders and their training in a regional training program; 2) recruitment of participants on the local level and their training in local programs at their respective community centers; 3) initiation of field projects by the graduates of the programs.

### *Building on Success*

The findings of the Senior Citizens Leadership program showed that “93% of the participants reported that the training contributed greatly to improving their leadership skills.” The center directors and the regional coordinator noted that the training contributed to the formulation of a cohesive group of participants and increased motivations. Thus successful leadership development in the sense of empowerment requires providing participants with necessary tools, both in the traditional educational sense as well as tools for socialization and group cohesion.

In terms of successful outcomes of the program, only 6 months after the completion of the training component of the program, many of the program participants had begun implementing projects for the community, mainly organizing leisure and cultural activities for the elderly in the community. Graduates stated that the program gave them new opportunities

for activity and contributed to their self-image. They also said that compared to senior citizen groups, where members are merely passive attendees, this program allowed them to determine and shape activities for themselves.

### Steering Committee

The creation of a steering committee gave a sense of ownership to the activities and changes of the group. After five classes of the Community Builders Project, the idea to create a steering committee was formed; the steering committee is currently composed of professional staff, course graduates, representatives of relevant local government departments, and members of the local community. Committee members meet several times a year to help define the goals and objectives of the program, provide support for the graduate activities, and decide criteria, objectives and input for participant selection.

### Supporting Graduates

In terms of post-course expectations, the participants' (of both the Community Builders Project and senior citizen leadership program) views regarding their future involvement in the Community Builders Project reveals that there is not a clear understanding of the expectations and ways they can continue to be involved in community projects and action after completing the course. All participants expressed their intention to be involved in the graduates program, however there is a lack of clarity regarding expectations as to the type of involvement is expected.

A main challenge that the senior citizens leadership program faced was that it was hard for participants to determine what they were tangibly expected to do once they were graduates of program. Only six months after the beginning of the program, 1/3 of trained program graduates decided not to continue to the project implementation phase, presumably because they did not

understand what was expected of them. The Community Builders Project has graduated over 120 alumni in the past 8 years, and has done an overall better job at retaining graduates; with nearly 40% of the course graduates involved in some regard in current Community Builder course activities. However, even with this being said, according to the program's internal records, 19% of the course graduates are not involved in any local activities despite efforts to re-involve them in community activism.

In terms of long-term community involvement, an additional component of the program supports Community Builders Project graduates from the past eight courses in their ambition to create social change. The program staff supports a wide range of activities including professional consultation and technical assistance. As for continued communal involvement, different avenues of involvement for course graduates are assistance in current team operating projects, serving on the steering committees of the Community Builders, as well as helping to host delegations that visit the Beit Shean region.

A gathering of all graduates takes place once every other month, and graduates have the opportunity to bond together as a leadership team, and to share best practices and program ideas. These meetings deepen the connections between all of the graduates and create a critical mass of active and involved residents – Community Builders Project graduates who are becoming the present and future leaders of the region. This is a great avenue for graduate support, however one should note that currently only 50% of course graduates attend these bi-monthly gatherings.

## ***Discussion & Conclusion***

The purpose of the paper was to understand what elements of a community leadership development program contributed to the empowerment of individuals involved which led to positive community change and development. The hypothesis asserted that the different components of the project (Education, Practicum and Guidance) enhance the ability to empower individuals by improving their confidence and skills, by increasing feelings of self-efficacy of the empowered individuals.

The research findings supported the overall hypothesis; by empowering people the Community Builders program was able to see better results and motivation from participants. Specifically, the elements of leadership training and education in the program helped facilitate feelings of motivation and self-efficacy. The findings agreed with the research that argued that if one feels he is not capable of the task at hand, he is less likely to get involved; people get involved in activities that they judge themselves capable of handling. As much of the research suggested, participants need to feel that they understand what is expected of them, as well as feel that they are competent in their abilities.

Utilizing the Community Builders Project as an example, it is clear that a formal educational course facilitates individuals to be empowered to bring about community change. The course structure, which allowed for individuals to progress through different phases of learning helped participants gain a truly sophisticated understanding of leadership.

The key findings in the research suggest certain implications for future leadership development endeavors of both nonprofit as well as for-profit organizations. The research points to specific elements of the program that strongly contributed to the empowerment of the individuals involved. The research indicated that in order to empower individuals, it is not

enough to just give them the tools for empowerment, through a course and in this case also through a practicum; there must also be an ongoing and continual system of support. From evaluation of the Community Builders Project, as well as analysis of the similar senior citizens leadership project, it is clear that in order to successfully run a community development course, there needs to be just as much emphasis on the post-course as there is on the course itself. Specifically, course graduate expectations need to be clearly laid out; graduates need to be engaged in community development past their own projects, and should be engaged in programming specifically applicable to them.

The case studied showed that different elements of the leadership course (education, a practicum, and guidance throughout the process) provided the participant with a set of leadership skills and tools related to project development, and thus promoted an overall sense of self-confidence. Hence, self-efficacy can be achieved through education and guidance, which leads to desired outcomes of empowerment. One participant detailed his feelings towards community development *"After you've gone through the course, things seem more doable and possible to you. I was nobody before and now I am part of a group of people who others know are promoting various projects for the community."*

The research findings also indicated that the presence of the practical component of the course complemented the learning experience of the course; a practicum can provide students with the opportunity to apply the tools and knowledge they gained through the course in real world application. However, a practicum is only as good as its ability to provide the students with a means to implement their learning. Hence, a practicum should always be aligned with the course objectives and structure.

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