



## **From Data to Report**

### *Compiling the data from your local social audit*

#### **ISARC Social Audit 2010**

#### **Introduction:**

After the hearings in a community, the convener gathers the data from the Reporters and the comments from the Rapporteurs. So much data! The data is emotional, powerful and the testimony of people who have rarely been heard. How does one begin to process this? In the Waterloo Region Social Audit, we had over 100 pages of data from the 19 different locations. So a filter is needed to sift through and organize all this information.

To make a local report, one is looking for significant themes that emerge from the stories and testimonies. After data is divided into themes, one searches for categories. Themes may be known – income security, lack of job opportunities, nutrition and hunger, affordable housing – but other themes may emerge. In Waterloo Region, four Conveners gathered to go through the reports, picking out themes and categories.

In the Waterloo Region audit, participants asked why there is poverty in such a rich region. They asked the question with stories and experiences that made this a theme. It is certainly tied to their lack of income security. Thus it could be a theme with a stronger emphasis or a category that is part of the income security theme.

“School expenses” emerged as a theme. School trips, special events, and meals like “hot dog days” were in previous audits. This year categories included athletic uniforms and fees for high school classes – gym and science were mentioned often. Students could not participate without paying the fees, even though some schools had special funds. Some high school students needed to take public transit even though the school was 5 km from home. The Conveners needed to decide if this was a category in the transportation or education theme.

Some themes and categories are difficult to describe. In Waterloo, we heard stories of resilience, stigmatization, lack of communication, lack of choice or the daily struggle to survive. These need to be reported as themes or categories, depending on the wisdom of the conveners who know the contexts of their communities.

Waterloo Region had a number of people with low incomes talk about “those people who abuse the system.” Conveners need to think deeply about these opinions. Do they belong with the struggle for self esteem of the people testifying? Should we report that people are abusing the system, even though this is very second hand information? One needs insight from others who are closer to the individuals who have testified. Since ISARC people are listeners, we couldn’t answer the question and did not put this information in our Social Audit.

Putting together themes and categories is like working a 1000 piece puzzle. It all fits together as a big picture. How does one describe this picture that communicates with the people who shared their experiences and observations? How will the people of the larger community read this



report? How do the stories from different locations fit together? Or are there significant differences between rural and urban OR between single adults and families that need to be highlighted by different themes and/or categories. At the end of the exercise, the Social Audit needs to tell the stories authentically.

These themes/ categories are then woven into a local report that can be distributed to people who participated in the audit as well as media. The local report is sent to ISARC where it will be compiled with other others for the provincial report.

### **The following are possible steps to simplify the process of data to report:**

#### **Step 1**

Collect the data and notes from Reporters and Rapporteurs.

#### **Step 2**

Read through the data and begin to sense the themes and categories that are present. Then using sticky notes to write down themes or a high liner mark the printed data start to put themes together with the experiences and illustrations. One can also use index cards. With high liners, use different colours for different types of categories: poverty, affordable housing, nutrition, transportation, struggle to survive, resilience, jobs. In Waterloo Region, four Conveners went through the data to put it into themes and categories.

#### **Step 3**

Bring notes and quotes from each category together. Observe when categories are “full” with many examples, illustrations, stories, and opinions. A full category means that additional information keeps reporting the same phenomenon. Then choose best stories, experiences, quotes and summaries that illustrate the category. Set aside data which has few comments; these can be examined later. Contemplate the categories. What is the best way to state the essence of each category? Is it unemployment or is it the search for jobs? Is it high rents or the lack of affordable housing? How have the people stated their concern?

#### **Step 4**

Begin putting together, writing and editing paragraphs on the various categories. Include the stories, experiences and quotes from the people. Do the materials that have been left aside fit into the overall report in a significant way? Then include them!

#### **Step 5**

Contemplate how this material can be organized to respect the people who have attend the hearings as well as people from the larger community who do not understand the impact of poverty and isolation. In the Waterloo Region report, the material could have been written up as many individuals and groups complaining about “the system” and their own predicaments. But data also shows people with resilience, in search of jobs, and committed to community centres and neighbourhood programming. Can the organization of the data also point to people who are caught in the poverty cycle with too little information about the social assistance system and opportunities in the community? The Convener makes a choice about which will communicate better in the community? That data is also present and can change the tone of the report.



### Step 6

Write and edit as a document for local participants, media, and government. Send the report to ISARC for the website and for the compilation of the ISARC provincial report.

The ISARC Social Audit will contain much data. The Conveners will be the filters and writers. Their task is done with deep respect for those whose testimonies have been collected.



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