

Residents Rising: How Facilitation Got Them Back on Track

Written by Sarah Fox

“Your idea might be different, but it was worth a conversation. And it didn’t necessarily matter whether that idea gets adopted, but opinions matter and you have the right to voice them,” says Carol.

Carol has been a resident in Kingston Galloway/Orton Park (KGO) for almost 35 years. She is an advisor to the resident-led group, Residents Rising, and over the seven years she has been involved with the group, she has witnessed how well people can work together towards a common goal. But she has also endured times of tension with the group, tension that is inevitable when people are planning, discussing and prioritizing.

At a particular time, Residents Rising got sucked into their personal grievances with the group and others in it. The strongest voices in the group were dominating the conversation, and others felt muted and were pushed away. Creativity was lacking and action was becoming stagnant. Residents Rising was stuck.

In situations where people need guidance or to learn more about a specific subject or skill, it is common to turn to the lecture lecturing: I tell you what needs to happen, you listen and learn. It is one or two experts relaying their knowledge upon others, without much room for contributions from the listeners.

But in Kingston Galloway/Orton Park (KGO), community members dare to do things differently. Residents Rising was founded on shared values and a belief that community members, at all levels and capacities, have skills to contribute; everyone’s input is of equal worth. These values are stemmed from a community development framework, that does not skip from problem to solution, but explores possibilities together.

To foster a healthy and thriving community, Residents Rising puts people first, and The Storefront is there to assist them using, among other things, facilitation processes.

Facilitation processes put emphasis on the fact that residents have a lot to bring to the table. By focusing on people, facilitation, when done well, can discover the skills and capacities of people; good facilitation helps foster personal growth within residents and explores the ways in which they can lead, participate and contribute together.

In the case of Residents Rising, they had lost sight of why they were there - what their purpose was in the community. Janet, Coordinator of Resident Leadership at The East

Scarborough Storefront, facilitated an exercise that is more often used to develop group norms or the “ground rules” within a group.

Janet asked the group three questions: who do you want to be to each other? Who do you want to be in the community? Who do you want to be to the world at large?

“It allowed them to kind of see their organization in all those - from all those different lenses. And I think it opened their eyes a little bit to like, ‘Oh, right. So we could be this.’ It allowed them to be aspirational in a different way,” Janet says.

This exercise was not about who is in charge or who is right. And Janet and members of the group did not walk into it with a specific outcome in mind because facilitation doesn’t operate that way. Facilitation focuses on people and the process and accepts the outcome, whatever it may be.

For Carol, Janet’s facilitation was successful in reminding people to think about why they were involved with the group. “I think it made people aware. And it was a good method of getting people to think. ‘Okay yes. What am I doing here? Am I there just because I want to be noticed? Am I there because I have nothing else to do?’”

Residents Rising has numerous projects and initiatives in the community that have and continue to bring joy to residents. The group has been instrumental in representing the voices of residents in KGO, and through organizing, connection and collective action, and programs that enrich the community.

“We’re still rising,” Carol says.