

25 YEARS OF IMPACT

Looking Back and Leading Forward





1990s

A Conversation About Strengthening Community

Tamarack's story began in the late 1990s with conversations between Paul Born, who was heading Opportunities 2000, and Alan Broadbent, chairman of Maytree. Paul and Alan talked about what it takes to get a broad range of stakeholders working together with people with lived experience of poverty to address big, complex issues. They began to see the outlines of something bigger: a national organization to promote the art and science of community change for cities, where people are engaged and working together to strengthen their community.

Tamarack Is Established

Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement was co-founded by Alan (founding chairman) and Paul (founding president). Its mission was to develop a process to help people create bold visions for the future of their communities and work together to achieve those visions more easily and effectively.

2000

2001

The Early Days

Alan, through Maytree, made a long-term commitment to funding and giving leadership to Tamarack, and Paul consulted with a small group of founders on how to scale Tamarack and the Opportunities 2000 learnings to a national level. Along with Alan and Paul, early founders included Alan Broadbent and Ratna Omidvar of Maytree, Tim Brodhead and Katharine Pearson of the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, Frances Westley of the McGill-McConnell program, and Sherri Torjman of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Vibrant Communities Is Launched

With leadership support from the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, just over 50 community leaders from 14 cities gathered at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Ont.

"We spent four days together having a really good conversation. On the last day, we introduced the idea of Vibrant Communities Canada. People were excited."
– Paul Born

2002



2003

Building and Sharing Knowledge

Tamarack established a Learning Centre to document and disseminate the learning. It grew to include web-based learning, e-newsletters, tele-learning, online workshops, and research papers. The knowledge was shared freely with anyone who wanted to access it. By 2004, more than 5,000 people used the services every month.

"The building of the knowledge base has been very important and was intentional at the outset. This was going to be the basis of Tamarack's work – we would not only work with communities but learn from them, document their learning, and leverage their learning so other communities and individuals could benefit."
– Alan Broadbent



The First Community Change Institute

Tamarack's signature learning event, a five-day gathering to inspire and renew community changemakers, took place at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Ontario. Interest ran high, so Tamarack arranged off-site accommodations and buses to carry people back and forth.

"We wanted to produce events that gave people the very best experience. There was a sense that the people coming to our events were going to contribute to the well-being of the Institute." – Paul Born

2005

2008

Publishing Books, Sharing Knowledge

Tamarack captured Trail Builder stories and learnings in a new book, **Creating Vibrant Communities: How Individuals and Organizations from Diverse Sectors of Society are Coming Together to Reduce Poverty in Canada**, edited by Paul. That year, Paul also published **Community Conversations: Mobilizing the Ideas, Skills, and Passion of Community Organizations, Government, Businesses, and People**, a book that has sold more than 20,000 copies.

Entering a New Phase

As the Trail Builder experiment drew to a close, Mark stepped down as Vibrant Communities Director and Liz Weaver from the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction took up the role.

"Tamarack was in the process of engaging its Vibrant Communities partners in a conversation about where to go from here. What would be the next iteration of the poverty reduction movement? How could we keep working together and building momentum? We started to refocus on what Cities Reducing Poverty could look like." – Liz Weaver



2010



2011

Collective Impact Builds Its Profile

Tamarack was writing its Trail Builder report when the article **Collective Impact** appeared in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. It presented a framework for how organizations across all sectors could work together to achieve a common goal. It described, in fact, what Tamarack had been doing since 2002 with Trail Builder.

"We had been doing [Collective Impact] ourselves, just using different language. We were doing a Canadian version with on-the-ground experiences and practices. The ideas we had been writing about and implementing in communities became very popular thanks to our partners at FSG and Aspen [Roundtable for Community Change] in the United States." – Mark Cabaj

Trail Builder Success

Results were tabulated and they were extraordinary. The experiment would eventually impact nearly 250,000 people, producing solid evidence that collaborative, cross-sector action is a successful way to reduce poverty. Based on these results, Vibrant Communities opened its model to all cities. Membership jumped to 26 cities.

"In Calgary, city council adopted a process that would allow anyone who was low-income to get 50% off their bus pass. That was our first big systems change, affecting about 10,000 people." – Paul Born



2012

2013

Growing and Evolving

Bolstered by an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant, Tamarack invited more cities to the Vibrant Communities network. Tamarack refined its learning approach, grouping resources and learning into five practice and idea areas: Collective Impact, Community Engagement, Collaborative Leadership, Community Innovation, and Evaluating Impact. A community of practice known as Deepening Community, with Sylvia Cheuy as director, was formed to explore how to build stronger, more inclusive neighbourhoods.

Deepening Community in Canada

Paul published his book **Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times**, which has sold more than 20,000 copies. The book presents four pillars of “deep” community: When people share their stories, take time to have fun together, care for one another, and work together to make the world a better place, their communities become more connected and resilient places to live. These themes formed the basis of the growing Deepening Community practice.



2014

2015

Poverty Summits Are Established

Vibrant Communities began hosting annual national summits that continued raising the profile of poverty reduction in Canada. The 2015 summit in Ottawa called for the three levels of government – municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal – to align their efforts to reduce poverty.

Poverty Reduction Gains Momentum

The 2016 Vibrant Communities summit in Edmonton, called Cities Reducing Poverty: When Mayors Lead, drew mayors from cities large and small across Canada to discuss and share ways to build economically inclusive communities. The 2017 summit in Hamilton, Cities Reducing Poverty: When Business is Engaged, featured business leaders who profiled initiatives such as Living Wage, and financial empowerment. With the federal government committing in 2016 to a national poverty reduction strategy, momentum was on the rise, and Tamarack was a national voice and advocate.



2016



2017

Two National Movements and a Learning Centre

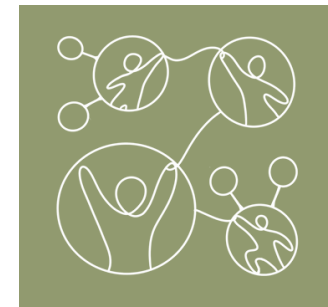
Vibrant Communities was now engaged in two national campaigns. Cities Reducing Poverty named a bold goal to improve the lives of 1 million Canadians within 10 years. Cities Deepening Community was a network of 25 member cities by 2021 to committed to strengthening local communities and deepen bonds between neighbours. Tamarack's Learning Centre was growing the capacity of the 24,000 community builders by equipping them with the skills, knowledge, resources, and connections to make lasting change.

Vibrant Communities

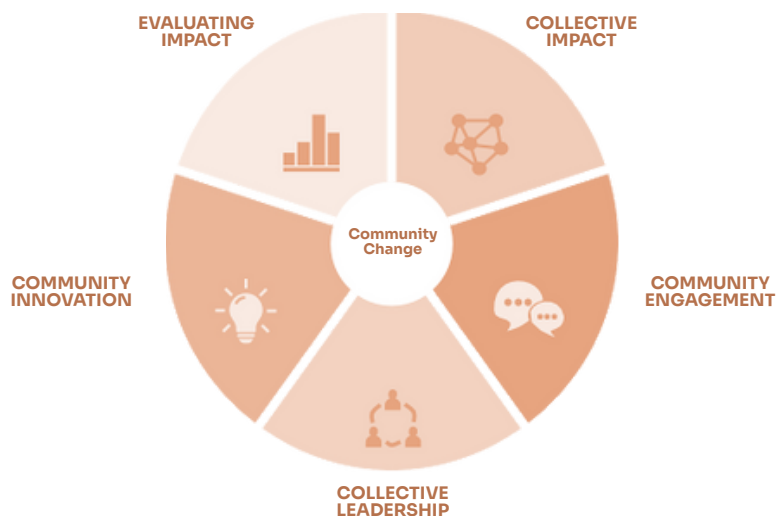
At the beginning of 2017, membership in Vibrant Communities grew rapidly. Between 2017 and 2022, Communities Ending Poverty became a major contributor to ending poverty for over 1.3 million Canadians. Communities Ending Poverty grew to over 100 regional networks, representing nearly 350 municipalities in Canada developing and implementing plans for poverty reduction. In 2018, Canada Launched Opportunity for All: Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy, and Tamarack is recognized as a key contributor to Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy. By 2022 Tamarack was recognized internationally and by the Government of Canada for our contributions to Canada's success in poverty reduction.

The Learning Centre

In August of 2017, Tamarack appointed Liz Weaver to join Paul Born as co-CEOs of Tamarack. Liz continued to provide leadership to the Learning Centre, increasing the scope of offerings for a growing audience from around the world. Over the next five years, the size of our learner network nearly doubled from 24,000 learners to over 40,000. Joining Liz were Lisa Attygalle, Sylvia Cheuy, Myriam Bérubé and Jean-Marie Chapeau, making Tamarack a thought leader in five core areas of community change: Collective Impact, Community Engagement, Community Innovation, Collaborative Leadership, and Evaluating Impact. The Learning Centre built strategic partnerships with global leaders advancing community change, including the Collective Impact Forum, the Aspen Roundtable for Community Change, and Place Matters UK.



2017



2019

Growth at Cities Deepening Communities

Stewarded by Heather Keam, **Cities Deepening Community** turned momentum into a movement as communities united working together to rebuild Canada's social infrastructure. In 2019, Cities Deepening Community launched a formal membership approach (an attempt to replicate the success of Communities Ending Poverty) at a major national conference they hosted in the City of Edmonton – its first member. By 2022, Cities Deepening Communities was scheduled to be supporting members working in nearly 50 communities and supporting over 8,000 learners as part of their movement.

Based on learnings and impacts from **Communities Ending Poverty** and Deepening Community and with guidance from communities and partners, the team launched two new networks in partnership with bold leaders at Employment and Social Development Canada. In 2020, **Communities Building Youth Futures** engaged an initial 13 communities to create systems that support youth to thrive in work, school, and life. In 2021, **Community Climate Transitions** launched with 19 communities to advance local climate action and climate equity.



2019

A Renewed Vision and Strategy for Tamarack

In April of 2019, Tamarack engaged a revitalized board of directors with a framework that prepared Tamarack for the next 10 years. The board was chaired by community social innovator Shauna Sylvester and co-chaired by Brock Carlton, former CEO of the Canadian Federation of Municipalities.

Tamarack's Liz Weaver released **The Journey of Collective Impact: Contributions to the Field from Tamarack Institute**. Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health released the report **Connected Communities: Healthier Together**, recognizing Tamarack for our role in Collective Impact and Deepening Community. TogetherBC was launched and Tamarack advocacy caused Communities Ending Poverty to grow significantly.

Growing Our Movement for Change

In 2020, Tamarack engaged learners and members to set its vision for the next 10 years. A newly elected and expanded board began the process of strategic thinking – just as the COVID-19 Pandemic began. After completing internal consultations with the board, staff, and members; engaging an external evaluation; and exploring trends impacting community change the Tamarack Board set a vision for Tamarack to 2030. A new 10-year plan, New Energy, is launched:

- **Tamarack online learning was launched** with asynchronous online courses, growing to 5 offerings by the end of the year.
- **Tamarack launched Community Climate Transitions** in 2021 with Laura Schnurr leading.
- **Tamarack hired Myriam Bérubé** to develop and implement a Quebec strategy.
- **Tamarack launched a new Digital Engagement Sales and Learning** division to grow its digital learning capacity.
- **Tamarack was asked to increase its impact** and grow CBYF to 20 communities.
- **Communities Reducing Poverty became Communities Ending Poverty**, signalling a move from mitigating poverty's effects to actively working toward its eradication
- **A Tamarack convening** brought together over 1,000 changemakers to support the end of poverty and improved future for youth.
- **Tamarack released a paper in the Stanford Social Innovation Review** describing the role of a Field Catalyst and its experiences in the role.

2020



2022

Introducing Danya Pastuszek

A new 10-year plan was launched. Paul Born announced his retirement. Danya Pastuszek was appointed as Tamarack's new co-CEO in early 2022.

St. John, New Brunswick, Decreases Poverty with Tamarack's Support

In 2023, Tamarack released the Saint John Stronger Together case study to highlight how one community has successfully addressed poverty through a community collaborative model over a 20-year journey. Written by Sherri Torjman, one of the original evaluators for Tamarack's Vibrant Communities work, the [report highlights](#) the community's journey starting in 1999 with 100 local business leaders assembling to address poverty. They worked with an emphasis on "lifetime" poverty, which required more concerted effort toward their transition to a regional initiative through New Brunswick's Economic and Social Inclusion Network in 2020. Saint John demonstrates the importance of whole of community, collaborative efforts that engage across sectors and with lived/ living experience experts to achieve results. Through their work, high school graduation rates in focus neighbourhoods increased from 50% to 70%, social assistance cases decreased by 17% from 2010 to 2017, and the overall poverty rate decreased faster than national and provincial rates between 2001 and 2021.

2023



2024

Success and Transitions at Communities Building Youth Futures

In 2024, Tamarack released its [five-year evaluation of Communities Building Youth Futures](#), which highlights impacts across community, provincial /territorial, and national systems. In its first five years, CBYF engaged 63,938 youth and 6,258 local leaders, including 3,551 local employers; worked with 2,379 youth-serving organizations; and connected with over 1,784 government representatives. These connections led to important shifts in relationships and power dynamics, as well as changes to policies and resources flows. As highlighted in both the evaluation report and the [voices of youth report](#), CBYF also made important shifts in how youth, youth-serving organizations, communities, and government see the work of improving educational and employment outcomes through accessible education (including diverse credit pathways), youth engagement and leadership, identity and social connection, holistic health and well-being, and employment and mentorship. Not surprisingly, where data is available, these supports led to meaningful increases in youth completing high school. For instance, in Portage la Prairie, where four year graduation rates increased from 72.5% to 78.2% between 2019 and 2023.