we create cool

We are cool. You may not agree but look harder, in a different way, or with a cooler set of sunnies. I worked with a company in Calgary called Bleeding Art Industries (BAI) whose tag line is ‘we create cool.’ I want to create cool! BAI is a creative, innovative company who create things like the bodies that you see on CSI morg tables with the skin peeled back, blood and guts, they also are pyrotechnic experts, staging explosions, fires and car crashes for movies and TV shows. They create cool and we can too! We’ve got cool people, cool ideas, cool artists and cool spaces. All the necessary ingredients, oh, and we also have cool happening right now. Like the summer Street Festival, North Forge North, TNT Mud Run, the Young Wolf Pack, Beatrice Wilson Centre, Fire-Spirit and so much more.

A couple years ago Dave and I started spending more time here. I thought if I’m going to be here, I want this place to be as cool as it can be. Thinking about what I could do to spark some more cool, I worked with 14 community leaders to build a community sculpture, I hosted a Nuit Blanche experience at the Lake. That’s a story in itself, ask someone who attended to tell you about it. Then last year I was on track to do something equally amazing (in my mind) but somehow got involved in the provincial election. A sense of duty? Crazy? I don’t know, but it was community focused.

Here we are, 2020, an opportunity to explore community jumped out at me. A crime prevention initiative focused on community capacity building and mobilization, the intention - to do a community assessment and create an inclusive crime prevention strategy. Crime and cool? Crime, not cool. If we create innovative ways to address crime, engage community and build an inclusive, welcoming community, that’s cool! Just came across the Cool City Crime Prevention committee in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, they develop and promote crime prevention programs and promote cooperation with local law enforcement. So, crime and cool? Why not.

Big question is how do we as a community become innovative? If we keep doing what we’re doing, we’ll end up with the same. We’ve got to change our approach. The United Way Calgary and J5, a design company, partnered to start the Social Impact Lab. The United Way realized that they would hand out funding and the next year the same organizations would request funds for the same issues. They needed to look for alternate ways to increase their impact. The focus of their Lab is to address big social issues using systems and design thinking. Totally intrigued by this, we’re going to use some of this same thinking and action to address crime prevention here. Exploring approaches through pop-ups, hack-a-thons, ideation sprints, using a social innovation and impact lab as our testing ground, we’ll build on existing initiatives and create innovative ways to address community crime, towards community well-being.

We’re looking to spark engagement and encourage collaboration so that our community can thrive. It will only happen when more people are moved to do the same. We can impact our trajectory with the actions we take, and it takes all of us.

A colleague once said, “It takes one hundred cups of coffee to get to know a community.” Since mid-January I’ve had 110 cups with people, and I don’t even drink coffee. My dad is so disappointed as he’s been making fresh coffee from beans since the 60’s. He’s got every type of coffee maker, grinder, gadget and paraphernalia you can imagine. My aversion to coffee is likely because when I was a kid, he sent me down into the dark, cold basement utility room, to grind beans for his coffee addiction. Traumatizing I know, but I digress. I stopped having those in person coffee talks mid-March when COVID-19 started marching its way north.

When I called people to meet, we would go to their favourite coffee spot thinking it would be good to connect on common ground. Higher Ground, a great local coffee shop in my old neighbourhood. It’s been a mainstay in the area for generations, outlasting Starbucks who closed shop a couple years into their tenure in our funky little area. I’d always call clients and friends to meet at Higher Ground because I could walk there in 15 minutes, it’s locally owned and it has such a relaxing, calm vibe. The most important reason, their homemade chocolate baking of course. Common spaces where we can be together or alone ground community, especially now when we can’t be in them. They create a level of comfort, give a sense of belonging, anonymity and connection. Think of Fat Boy’s, A&W, Miss The Pas, Good Thymes and the old Hawaiian to name a few, how many of you are regulars? Kudos to all the local businesses in our area, thanks for giving us space. We’ll be back.

Why did I start by going for coffee? Because it starts with a conversation and leads to community. Let’s set a spark and make shift happen!

Email me if you want to Get Involved: karendriedger@gmail.com

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