



The  
**Confluence**  
Story Book

**A Collection of Stories**

from the Center for Ethical Leadership's  
**Confluence Program**  
1999-2003

Written by

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# Introduction

A confluence occurs when two streams join to form a larger river. A confluence also occurs when people come together to share ideas. In Seattle, Washington, The Confluence has come to mean an event that gathers many diverse individuals together for three days, to creatively engage on a complex social issue of mutual interest.

The Confluence is sponsored by the Center for Ethical Leadership with partnership from the business community, faith-based institutions, education, human service and government agencies, youth and low-income groups. The Confluence offers a safe, “Gracious Space” for dialogue and encourages participants to take a system-wide view of the issue to foster new thinking and opportunities for collaboration.



The gathering of diverse perspectives in Gracious Space is often a unique experience for participants. They come away with pertinent information, strong connections, and renewed energy to be change agents around the issues they care about. Many participants form work groups to address the issues in a more collaborative way. And several make lifelong friendships with people they might never have had the opportunity to meet.

In three years, approximately 200 individuals have attended The Confluence. This booklet contains some of the stories of their experience: what they learned, how they changed, and how they bring a broader perspective to their work.

## Collisions of Possibility

The term “Collisions of Possibility” describes the unexpected results that can arise when committed, passionate people are brought together around a common interest. Often, these collisions result in shared expertise or resources – for instance, someone will offer their grant writing skills to help a new colleague get an idea off the ground. Sometimes, whole new projects or initiatives will grow out of Collisions of Possibility.



*A laughing exercise from Confluence 2002*

## Core partners 1998-2004:

Church Council of Greater Seattle  
Leadership Tomorrow Alumni  
YMCA of Greater Seattle

## New Partners Added in 2003–2004:

The Boeing Company  
Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce  
United Way of Seattle/King County  
Seattle Foundation



# Table of Contents

## Sections

Gracious Space and Inquiry .....	5
Issue Awareness and Action .....	15
New Networks and Connections .....	33
Leadership Tools and Approaches .....	47

<b>Collisions of Possibility</b> .....	6, 16, 34, 48
--	---------------

## Confluence Story Tellers

Allen, Dannette .....	37
Alvarado, Gregory .....	49
Begashaw, Tita .....	57
Bremson, Victor .....	27
Erskine, Roger .....	29
Freeman, Anitra .....	11
Gossett, Larry .....	23
Lang, Rich .....	41
Maranan, Paola .....	13
Paulson, Allan .....	19
Pehrson, John .....	21
Proby, Shelia .....	9
Sanchez, Yvonne .....	53
Sandel, Rebecca .....	55
Sando, David .....	45
Sarka, Eskinder .....	39
Sims, Tammi .....	25
Spears, Bev .....	7
Thai, Linh .....	51
Trites, Barbara .....	35
Wilder, Verlene .....	43
Woldt, Alice .....	17



# Gracious Space and Inquiry

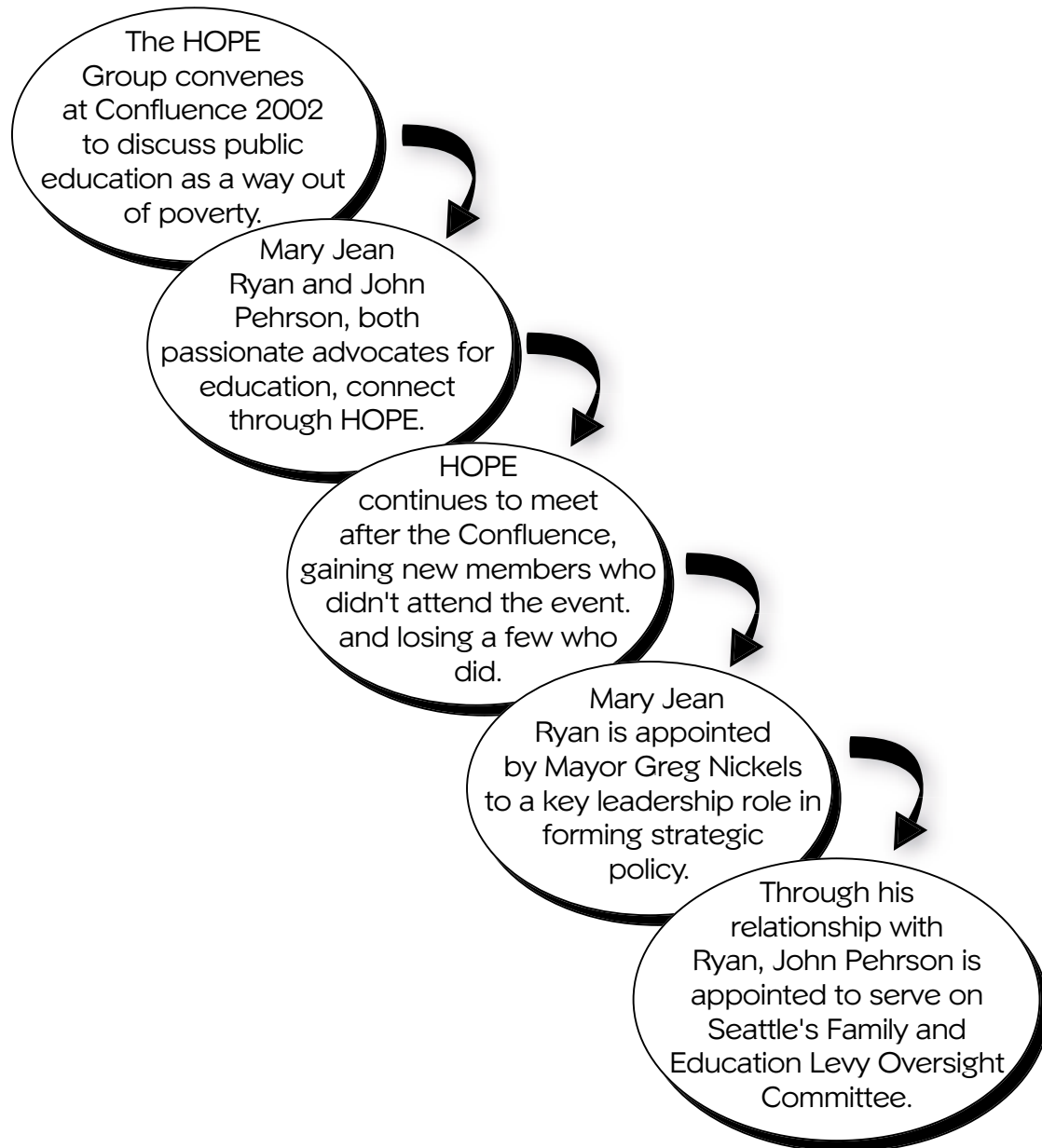
Gracious Space is a tool and a concept taught by the Center for Ethical Leadership to help individuals and groups work better together. Gracious Space is a spirit and a setting where we seek “the stranger” and embrace “learning in public.” In this space, people feel safe to share ideas, be curious and learn from others, and use the strength of diversity to shape creative, positive solutions.

Several participants at The Confluence say that Gracious Space is one of the most powerful concepts they take from the event. For many, it gives them an opportunity to hear opposing viewpoints and work more collaboratively with others who approach the issue differently. In this section, participants share stories about how Gracious Space has had a lasting impact on their lives and in their work.

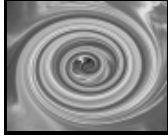
## In This Section

Bev Spears .....	7
Shelia Proby .....	9
Anitra Freeman .....	11
Paola Maranan.....	13

# Collisions of Possibility



At various points in this story book, we will share Collisions of Possibility from Confluence events in 1999, 2000 and 2002. The Collision on this page tracks the results when two passionate education advocates – Mary Jean Ryan and John Pehrson – were introduced at Confluence 2002.



**B**ev Spears stands before 250 parishioners from three area churches, addressing a difficult subject: mental illness. It is a topic that typically evokes images of homeless people or secluded institutions, when in fact mental illness is far more prevalent, and usually strikes closer to home.

“Everybody has a story of how mental illness has personally affected them or someone they know,” Bev says. “Mental illness among homeless people is extremely widespread, but it is more likely that your neighbor, someone in your office or church suffers from a biochemical brain disorder.

“Mental illnesses include clinical depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or a host of anxiety disorders — things that aren’t talked about because of the social stigma. The workshops give people an opportunity to address some of their concerns in a caring setting.”



Bev Spears

Bev recently earned her Masters degree in theology, and sees this work as her ministry. “Faith communities are places of healing, where someone who is suffering is likely to turn to for help,” she said. “But most faith communities are uncertain of how to respond to those who struggle with mental health issues. Healing is not always about a cure. Sometimes it’s having the grace to manage our lives with health challenges. This is especially true for people who struggle with chronic mental illness. A spiritual journey and associated relationships can help.”

Bev provides education and outreach programs to help church communities confront the stigma and fear associated with mental illness. She helps church members understand and communicate to others that these are physical, not social, diseases. And she provides professional and community resources for their members in need.

Bev is an animated woman with sparkling eyes and a contagious passion for her work. The workshops on mental illness are just one of the ways she ministers hope and healing to communities. Hers is a ministry without walls — a ministry of compassion she offers through Sage Connections, a consulting firm she founded based on her core values of compassion, integrity and justice.

The importance of core values is something she took from her early association with the Center for Ethical Leadership. But it was her interest in community building that brought her to The Confluence in 2002. At the time Bev, was working with low-income families in the White Center community to improve their chances for economic stability and success. With a focus on “Building Communities that Work for All,” The Confluence provided Bev a unique opportunity to increase her knowledge and network with others involved in community building.

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“Coming from the field of government policy analysis, this was my first hands-on, community organizing job,” she said. “Anything to do with community building and community development was of interest to me.”

Bev admits she was skeptical about coming to The Confluence, concerned that it would be “preaching to the choir” and uncertain of the outcomes. She came away with a handful of close friendships and a powerful experience of Gracious Space that significantly changed how she does her work. Gracious Space is an approach the Center uses and teaches to create a trusting environment where people can explore difficult issues and learn from each other in powerful ways.

During The Confluence, Bev hosted a discussion on the issue of racial diversity and reconciliation. It is a common topic among people trying to build community, but one that is often divisive and intimidating. “Respecting diversity is always one of the challenges to building communities,” she acknowledged. “It comes up even if it’s not on the agenda. The issue is how to honor peoples’ feelings and experiences associated with diversity and work through those to a new place.”

Bev hosted her discussion in the chapel of the retreat center — which for her represented a Gracious Space — and focused on the teachings of Gracious Space. She tried to create an atmosphere of safety, where people would feel secure enough to speak up and be willing to learn. Bev also took intentional steps to empty herself and let feelings flow through her, ready to listen to whatever needed to be said. “I didn’t orchestrate it too much,” she recalled. “I wanted to leave room for mystery.”

What happened was profound.

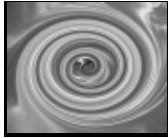
“I was conscious of trying to create Gracious Space, and people really felt it,” she said. “They left their guns at the door and were less angry. They felt safe to speak their truth without being afraid someone would jump down their throats. I think even people who had strong opinions when they walked in the door listened in a new way, and despite themselves, really learned from each other.

“The Confluence was the first time the power of Gracious Space sank in,” Bev recalled. “I immediately saw it as a way of doing my ministry. The place you hold a discussion and how you hold it makes a big difference. It was a real epiphany, and I’ve used Gracious Space ever since.”

What Bev has learned about working to heal relationships in communities over the years could fill a book. But the most important step, she believes, is to remain true to your core values. “What the Center keeps coming back to is core values and that is very inspiring,” she said. “Core values are very foundational, and they enable me to have an integrated life.”

So whether she is working with families in poverty, educating faith communities about mental illness, or teaching her own children to recognize and respond to injustice, Bev’s moral compass points toward her core values of compassion, integrity and justice. They provide just enough structure for her ministry without walls, and enough room for mystery to unfold. And that, she believes, is the magic of a compassionate community.





## Shelia Proby

## Making a Difference Through Dialogue

Shelia Proby leans into the table beaming broadly. Her five children are making progress in college and their jobs, and she is working toward a degree in computer programming. As she describes her family, her career and her goals for making the



Shelia Proby

community a better place, her smile reflects her words: “Everything is coming together for me.”

A single mother who spent two years homeless and many more struggling to make ends meet for her family, Shelia feels she’s coming into her own. “I’ve always wanted to do good in the world,

but never had the confidence or education or the time,” she said. “Now I’ve gotten my life to where I can help others. My kids are of age, and I have confidence in what I know. One day soon I’ll just fly out there and deal with things that need my help.”

Her desire to help drew Shelia to Confluence 1999, with its focus on “Closing the Income Gap.” As a board member for The Homelessness Project, Shelia wanted to learn about new ways to close the income gap. She also was intrigued with the Center’s message of justice and hope. She subsequently joined the Center’s six-month Citizen Leaders Institute, and returned to The Confluence in 2000 to address issues of poverty.

Shelia’s experience at The Confluence made her aware of the many efforts underway to address issues of homelessness, poverty and troubled youth. “I didn’t think

there were so many people who cared,” she said. “The Confluence gave the opportunity for people to talk about important issues that don’t normally get addressed. You brought strangers together and created a strong bond. It was a very empowering thing.”

One of the most significant “take-aways” Shelia gained at The Confluence was the concept of dialogue. Dialogue offers a deeper way of listening and sharing ideas, with an intention on learning. Shelia found herself in conversations with business people, government agency representatives, educators and religious leaders, all of whom had different ideas of how to approach the issue of poverty.

“I learned how different people think and how to talk about our different points of view on the same issue,” she said. “Classism, racism, age differences, financial differences – all of these factors play a role in ending poverty. Some of them thought they were helping, but were able to see they were really missing the mark. I learned to be more open-minded instead of angry, and found a more respectful way to express my experiences and bring my knowledge to the table.”

Shelia carried that experience into her neighborhood and workplace, where she occasionally comes across people with strong opinions or prejudices.

“I feel like I’m in the middle now,” she said. “I understand the anger of people who want to fight for a better life, but I also experienced the many people who are trying to help. Most people are in their own world with a one-sided point of view. I try to show that most people are not intentionally hurtful, and if we let go of our fears and stereotypes we can change things without having to fight.”

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Shelia also took from The Confluence a sense of hope and responsibility. “Once you know what’s wrong, you become responsible,” she said. “It’s why I went back to school. I want to try to make a difference. I know now that if enough people get together they can make a difference on a broader level, and there is definitely a need for that.”

With the networks and information she gained, Shelia wants to create a program that gives youth the skills to be successful in life, and provides better role models for male youth. She would like to see the criminal justice system “slowly disperse” and provide alternatives to kids who would otherwise run into trouble.

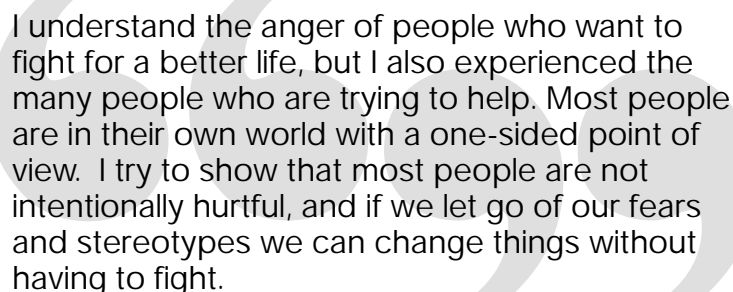
She has already left a legacy of doing good. As a program volunteer for troubled youth, she encouraged the coordinators to take the kids camping in the “real” outdoors, rather than in West Seattle as they had planned. “I wanted them to see the stars and get dirty. So they said ‘You do it.’ It was the first time anyone let me do anything like that.” Several years later, the program still

takes the youth for a “real” camping experience.

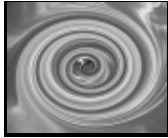
Her own children are a testimony to her dedication to living her values. “They have all turned out great,” she said. “They are doing what I intended for them to do: living their lives, taking care of themselves and being socially responsible and community minded.”

These successes reveal her commitment to not leave anyone behind. “I like to create an atmosphere free of insecurity and fear, and see everyone pumped up. I get so exhilarated about the possibilities, I want to bring others with me.”

With three more quarters of school until she earns her degree, Shelia is already looking forward to her graduation celebration, and the opportunity to spend more time in the community. “That was and still is the goal,” she said. “The Confluence helped me see what’s really going on and how I can make a difference.”



I understand the anger of people who want to fight for a better life, but I also experienced the many people who are trying to help. Most people are in their own world with a one-sided point of view. I try to show that most people are not intentionally hurtful, and if we let go of our fears and stereotypes we can change things without having to fight.



## Anitra Freeman

## Creating Real Change for Seattle's Homeless

In a group of low-income and homeless people learning to be writers, Anitra Freeman encourages a participant to read his poem to the group. When he finishes, the group applauds his prose and his courage, and his face fills with a smile.

This is StreetWrites, a program that provides peer support and an outlet for some of Seattle's poorest citizens to express themselves. Anitra founded this program through her work at Real Change, a homeless empowerment organization that advocates for homeless issues and provides homeless individuals a voice and employment through its urban newspaper.

Part philosopher and part activist, Anitra speaks directly and with animation about her life mission. Her work as an organizer and "extreme humanitarian" takes many forms: writer, poet, computer literacy teacher, housing advocate, networker, lobbyist, friend and sometime rabble-rouser.

For several years Anitra has worked with Real Change, SHARE (Seattle Housing and Resource Effort) and WHEEL (Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League) to bring hope and real solutions to the city's homeless population. She was drawn to Confluence 2000 because of its focus on addressing root causes of poverty.

The Confluence came at an important time, she says, because she was seeking patterns of poverty and homelessness that linked to the larger issues of social justice and social change.



Anitra Freeman

"I liked the concept of the Center for Ethical Leadership," she said. "I liked that The Confluence was for something positive rather than against something negative. I thought, 'Oh goody! Lots of other people will be looking for the roots of poverty, too!'"

One of the "small but precious" experiences Anitra had at The Confluence helped her see the power of dialogue and bridging polarities. Bridging polarities is an approach to conflict where opposing parties realize they are deeply connected to the same issue, only with different points of view. Once you understand there is a connection, Anitra says, you can make progress. Often at odds with the City of Seattle over human service policies and funding, she found herself at a table with Allan Painter from the city's human services department.

"I've given Allan a hard time in the past," Anitra recalled, grinning. "But at The Confluence I made a human connection with him that has lasted even as we still disagree over certain things. Dialogue helped me get to the point where I can separate a person from their behavior. I may not like their values or position, but I can still relate to them as a human being."

"Polarization is what makes us stuck," she said. "It becomes about how different we are, and who is beating up whom, and everyone loses track of what we're trying to do. If opposites on the pole are connected, this means that liberals and intellectuals can no longer disdain fundamentalists and hope they go away. There is real anger here that needs to be bridged, but also a real connection that

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allows us to bridge. This is how we address root causes and find creative solutions.”

After *The Confluence*, Anitra took a new approach to her work as an activist. “I don’t want to be the kind of pacifist who beats my opponent over the head with my peace sign,” she said. “I will use all the pressure and outrage I feel and put it toward love. If I want to get past polarization, I have to lead the way.”

Anitra sought out individuals who appeared to be polar opposites and engaged them in dialogue. “There is a lot of learning for me and occasionally some learning for them. But if I learn more than they do, who is really ahead?” she asks, her eyes twinkling.

Anitra thinks of the human species as Homo “Wanna-Be” Sapiens, that is, we want to be intellectual beings, but too often we are motivated by primal urges to protect our own kind. “We have a basic, biological tendency to value the interests of ourselves and our kin, like animals who want to have all the bananas. If we can recognize this about ourselves, but not be driven by these emotions, we can move on.

“But we’re not taught in terms of dialogue and conflict resolution,” she continued. “We’re taught to compete. And that’s the real value of *The Confluence* – you bring your core values to issues of the common good and use dialogue to work together.”

Anitra noticed that when she speaks in a light and joyful way about her vision, people

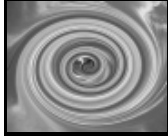
are moved and often return months later to describe the impact she had on them. But when she speaks from desperation and urgency, she doesn’t get anywhere.

“It’s hard for me to see people dying on the streets and not get desperate and angry at the people who have taken away their bananas,” she said, her voice softening. “But that’s the old biology talking, and it just makes the situation worse. It’s in love and joy that things change. That’s the spirit talking. There is no justice in holding someone accountable for doing wrong unless I have faith in their doing good.”

A native of Seattle, Anitra has noticed a shift in the way people think about homelessness these days. Rather than trying to “end homelessness,” she encourages people to envision a world where homelessness no longer exists, and to work toward that. It is a subtle but important shift, she says, because it creates hope for the future, rather than simply ending an undesirable condition.

“What will society be like when we have no homeless people and no one who is desperately poor?” she asks.

So, armed with her pen and dialogue skills, Anitra gathers with colleagues to write poetry and advocate for real change. She aims to change the political will around poverty and homelessness one sentence, and one heart at a time.



**W**hen she sees children suffer, Paola Maranan is compelled to work harder. Paola has dedicated her professional life to improving the lives of children. Through public policy and legislative initiatives, she supports children living in poverty, without parents or homes, or in homes with domestic violence.



Paola Maranan

“Children are bearing the brunt of our collective neglect – too many are not safe, are not healthy and cannot reach their full potential,” she said. “I know we have the power and the will to build a different future for our kids.”

It was her passion for children that landed her an invitation to Confluence 2000, with its focus on “Uniting to End Poverty.” But Paola receives many conference invitations, so she did not immediately reply. As the Public Policy Director of Children’s Alliance, (she is now the Executive Director) she expected “the usual suspects” would gather to debate policy and legislation.

But then she looked closer.

“The Confluence described something so intriguing and so unlike anything I’d ever been to,” she recalled. “It was an amazing array of people. Everyone had a different rationale for being there, and they all were taking creative approaches to the issue of poverty. When I noticed that (King County Councilmember) Larry Gossett was taking three days to do this, I was blown away. It signaled that this was not your usual event – something different was going on.”

At The Confluence Paola encountered people from the business sector, religious organizations, social service agencies and government departments. She met with young people, formerly homeless men and women, ministers and educators.

“It was an amazing opportunity to talk about poverty with people from across the region,” Paola said. “This event reached beyond the usual suspects and got the whole community involved. It was both daunting and incredibly hopeful.”

One of the primary lessons Paola took from The Confluence was an understanding that poverty is a problem owned by the whole community, not just social service agencies and politicians.

“If we are to be successful at ending poverty – and the issues associated with it, such as mental illness, homelessness, domestic violence – we need to reach the hearts and minds of the broader community,” she said. “We need to unleash their will and help them identify what they can bring to the table. I was reminded that people care deeply about these issues, and as a policy maker I need their help.”

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Paola relished the opportunity to take off her “public policy hat” for three days and dialogue with others on the broader issue of poverty. If the region could figure out how to end poverty, she said, many other issues would be less complicated. For example, poverty is almost always a factor in domestic violence situations.

“If we end poverty, domestic violence would still exist, but it would be an entirely different issue,” she said. “If the victim wasn’t under economic stress and had choices about where to live, we could deal much better with the fundamental issue. But because poverty is always a concern, we spend our money and time nibbling around the edges of these things, but not getting to the fundamental issue of why there is domestic violence in families.”

This approach shaped her work at United Way of King County, where she led an initiative on Early Childhood Development. With her colleague and fellow Confluence participant Vince Matulionis, she pursued a broad approach to the initiative and invited others to share ideas.

A second significant “take-away” from The Confluence for Paola was the notion of Gracious Space, a skill and approach used by the Center for Ethical Leadership to encourage better communication and shared learning around difficult issues. Gracious Space has shaped how she interacts with colleagues and families.

“There were people at The Confluence I had previously vilified,” she recalled. “I assumed I knew them, but Gracious Space offered a unique opportunity to sit down with them and really listen. Gracious Space utterly challenged me, in the best way. I wasn’t trying to figure out how to score, or waiting for them to stop speaking so I could get my point across. I really listened to what they had to say and I heard a different person. I was astounded and knew it was something I could immediately take away.”

When viewed through the lens of Gracious Space, people had “great, heartfelt and creative ideas,” where previously she assumed they didn’t care about children’s issues. With Gracious Space, Paola was able to explore ideas, partnerships and solutions with several people at a deeper level than before.

After The Confluence Paola helped launch the Economic Fairness Project, a Confluence-based team that created a presentation on ending poverty and delivered it to a wide array of organizations. She maintains contact with many of the team’s members.

Paola recently returned to the Children’s Alliance as Executive Director, and believes the lessons she took from The Confluence – Gracious Space, connecting with people’s hearts and minds about ending poverty, and looking at the broader picture – will serve her well.

“I still use Gracious Space and try to live up to that challenge,” she said. “I have a renewed desire to fundamentally change the role of the community in dealing with poverty. And I want to connect with the innate concerns and goodness of people and learn what we can do together to create policy that will better serve the most vulnerable members of our community.”

# Issue Awareness and Action

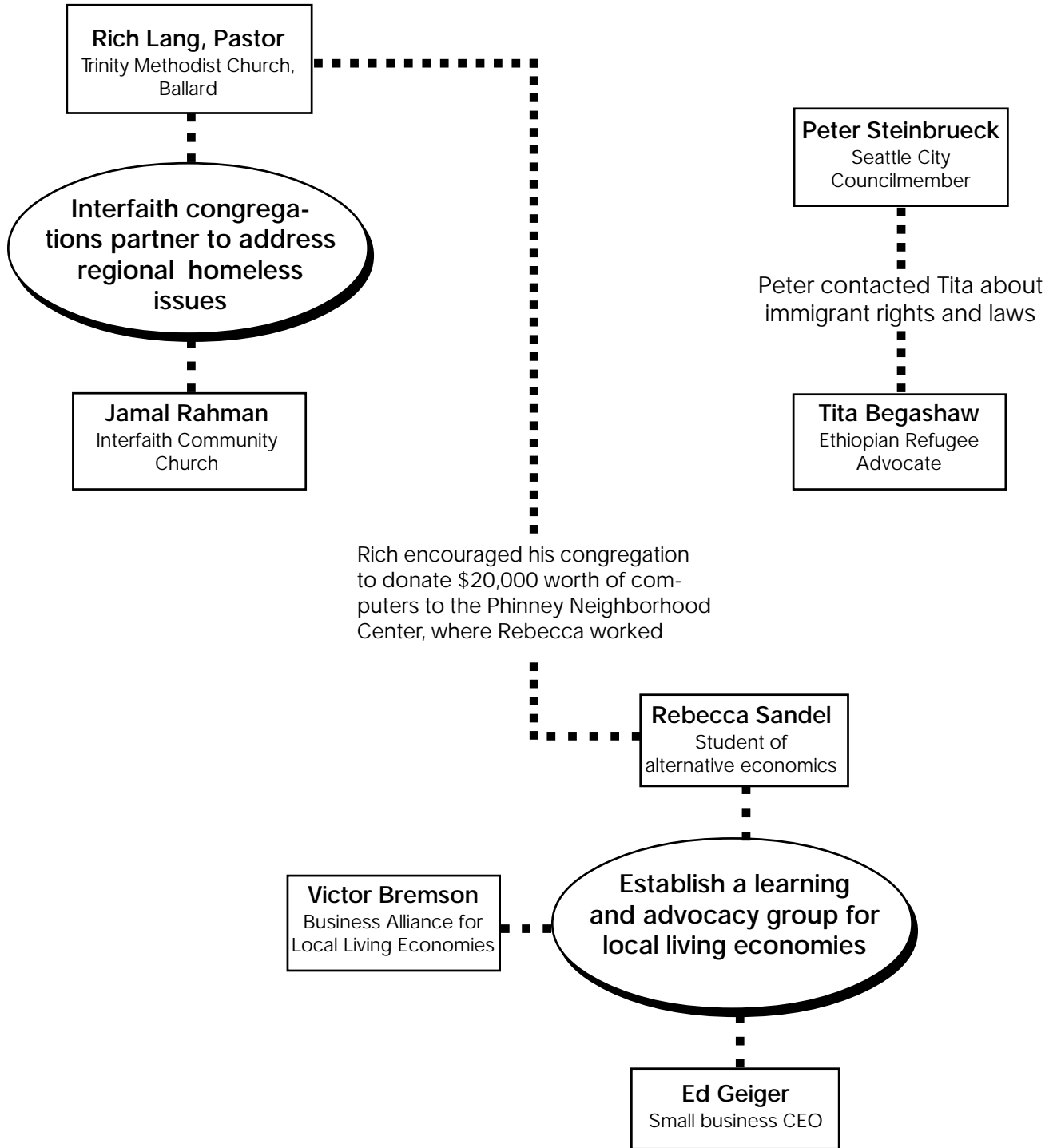
Confluence participants are invited based on their interest in the chosen topic. They represent the full spectrum of the community, and bring many different approaches to the issue. One of the critical outcomes of The Confluence is collaborative action on behalf of positive change. Many participants leave The Confluence with a greater awareness and understanding of the complexity of the issues they are dealing with. They learn from each other's diverse viewpoints and approaches, and come away better equipped to do the difficult work of social change.

The Confluence also enables the formation of new groups that commit to working together after the event to make progress on the social issue they care about. In this section, individuals share their stories of the increased awareness they gained about a particular issue, and the many actions they took as a result of their participation in The Confluence.

## In This Section

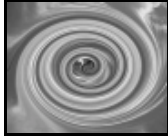
Alice Woldt .....	17
Allan Paulson .....	19
John Pehrson .....	21
Larry Gossett .....	23
Tammi Sims .....	25
Victor Bremson .....	27
Roger Erskine .....	29

# Collisions of Possibility



Illustrated on this page are several Collisions of Possibility among participants of Confluence 2002.





Alice  
Woldt

## Catalyzing Economic Justice

Alice Woldt was one of the first people to say “yes” to The Confluence, even before it had a name. In the five years that the Church Council of Greater Seattle has served as a core partner to The Confluence, Alice offered leadership at many critical moments in the project. She got involved at every level, including design, recruitment, attendance and evaluation.

Her can-do, direct approach led her to the heart of many projects that spun off from three Confluence events, projects that were relevant to the mission of the Church Council and her personal passion for economic justice.

“I said yes to the reputation of the Center, and Bill (Grace)’s leadership and his ability to do something important in the community,” Alice said. “It was an opportunity to build relationships and build unity among religious organizations and community members around important issues.”

Alice has not been disappointed with her commitment. Each Confluence has produced significant relationships, products and opportunities for learning from others. “In an urban community you infrequently have a window into people’s lives, interests or passions, and you don’t often have opportunities to share those with others outside your own enclaves,” Alice said. “The Confluence opens that window and gives life and vitality to the efforts of those of us who do this work.”

In 1999, The Confluence theme was “Closing the Income Gap” and Alice joined with others to discuss the coming WTO conference, globalization, and what they could do about it. It was the concept and practice of Gracious Space that enabled the group to discuss the issues in a relevant and honest way, Alice recalled.

“That first event was significant because it dealt with an issue that was so immediate – the wage gap,” she recalls. “There was great excitement and energy about the WTO – this critical event in the history of this community. And the homeless and low income voices at The Confluence stood out.”

Confluence 2000 produced an energized group of people who wanted to tackle the issue of tax reform. Organized around the theme “Uniting to End Poverty,” Confluence participants formed the Economic Fairness Project (EFP) and produced a presentation documenting Washington state’s often regressive tax structure and the impact it has on poor families.

Alice arranged for this presentation to be at the center of the Fall Assembly, a series of dinners for constituents of the Church Council. Mark McDermott, a member of the EFP and primary author of the presentation, later met with his brother U.S. Representative Jim McDermott, in one of the first meetings to bring people together around the issue of tax



Alice Woldt

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fairness. Mark and the EFP found a home for their work in the Washington Association of Churches, where it has become part of the Tax Fairness Coalition.

“Taxes had been an ongoing issue, but the work of The Confluence group was a catalyst for the current effort,” Alice said. “Now the Coalition and members of the original Economic Fairness Project have developed legislative initiatives being considered in the current legislative session.”

The Confluence has been instrumental in developing a web of amazing people that may not typically run into each other.

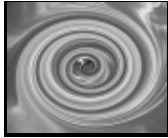
At the third Confluence in 2002, Alice joined forces with other religious leaders to form the Unity Project. Hosted one year after September 11, 2001, the Unity Project provided a time and place for an interfaith dialogue and memorial service for those who died in the acts of terrorism.

Many other connections came out of The Confluence for Alice, resulting in new partnerships on race relations, opportunities for co-housing, counseling to families and strategic planning for the Church Council itself.

“With any effort that builds relationships, you never know when they will pop up in pretty substantive ways,” Alice said. “The Confluence has been instrumental in developing a web of amazing people that may not typically run into each other. Yet you know there is a group of people with whom you share this one experience, and with whom you have common interests.

“The Confluence has really magnified and made abundant the sense of ‘we can trust each other and share what is on our minds’ and somehow a spirit is born that carries forward,” Alice said.

In saying “yes” to The Confluence, Alice found others who were ready to say “yes” to issues she most cares about, and in turn say “yes” to the most vulnerable members of our community. And that, in the end, is what The Confluence is all about.



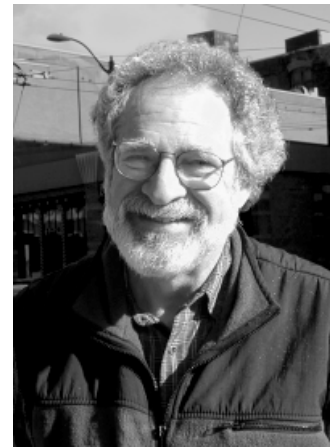
## Alan Paulson

## Finding Purpose in Ending Poverty

**A**llan Paulson is one of the fortunate people who discover a true calling in life. After a diverse and successful career in education and business management, Allan discovered his true purpose is ending poverty. Over the last three years he has completely rearranged his life to dedicate his most precious resources – time, money and energy – to that calling.

Allan is a thoughtful man with a quick and warm smile, who can turn a conversation on poverty and social justice into reason for hope. Growing up in the Jewish faith in a family of immigrants, Allan recalls that issues of justice became important to him early in his life.

As his parents negotiated the hurdles of being first-generation Americans born of Russian immigrants, Allan experienced first hand the difficulties of poverty and struggle. His paternal grandfather died young, likely from his own hand, and his maternal grandmother was plagued with deep depression throughout her life in America.



Alan Paulson

“I really identify with the immigrant experience,” he said over coffee in Pioneer Square. “My grandparents were casualties of immigration. This experience has given me greater empathy for people struggling, but I am also very positive about being in this country and the great things we are capable of.”

When he grew older, he participated in the civil rights movement in the 1960’s. This experience opened his eyes to his privileges, not just as an American, but of his white, middle-class upbringing.

Allan was serving as president for the Coalition for a Jewish Voice when he heard about Confluence 2000, with its focus on “Uniting to End Poverty.” Hoping to join with grassroots movements and steer the Coalition into broader issues of justice, Allan signed the Coalition up as a cosponsor of the event, and attended The Confluence.

His connections during the three-day event resulted in his leadership on the design and facilitation for a conference on homelessness at St. Mark’s on Capitol Hill. Allan saw this pro bono work as his gift back to the community for the privilege of attending The Confluence.

He also met people from labor and the Living Wage Movement, and was impressed with the diversity of leadership assembled at The Confluence.

“I built some strong alliances and relationships at The Confluence,” Allan said. “I am more open to the labor movement than I was before, especially with their efforts for immigrant workers and involving people from the bottom up.”

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But the biggest impact of The Confluence for Allan was clarifying his next steps in life. He had been slowly building toward a new understanding of his life purpose, and The Confluence helped him to recognize his passion for ending poverty and closing the wealth gap.

I want to find constructive ways to transfer wealth from the developed world to the developing world to end poverty.

“I want to find constructive ways to transfer wealth from the developed world to the developing world to end poverty,” he said. “The Confluence made that crystal clear to me. It also taught me the importance of making systemic changes and developing the political will to do this work. This has been an important concept and has shaped how I organize my time.”

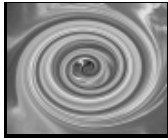
Through a series of unexpected events that unfolded in the three years after The Confluence, Allan found himself in a position to become a philanthropist. He and his wife decided to put the unanticipated funds toward social change.

Allan gradually closed down his consulting practice and began to learn about and build a portfolio of international philanthropy. He joined the Community Alliance for Global Justice and Grantmakers Without Borders, and with a handful of others in the Seattle area, started a new donor group called World Venture Partners, which makes grants to people and projects in Africa and the Americas.

Now Allan feels not so much retired as released, free to do the work that gives him joy and meaning. As he prepares to visit Zimbabwe and rural Mexico, he acknowledges the responsibility that comes with international philanthropy. He and his colleagues try hard to avoid doing good “to” people and falling into racially insensitive traps with respect to the help they provide. Rather, they focus on being of service and aligning their donations with the goals and methods of local organizations and communities.

Allan still lives among immigrants. His neighbors in SeaTac are nearly all first generation Asian families, and he is experiencing again the struggles of new Americans trying to make it in this country. Being with them helps Allan stay grounded and focused on his work.

Allan is sometimes surprised at the path his life and work have taken, and is grateful for the turn of events that brought him to this place. He is also grateful for the role The Confluence had in clarifying his true calling. But his face lights up when he realizes once again that now he gets to work full-time on social justice issues and has the opportunity to make a real difference in someone’s life.



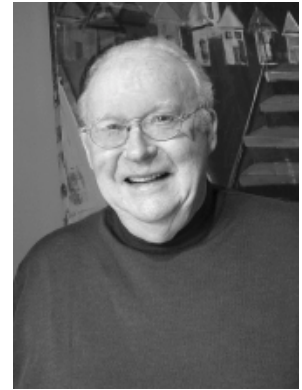
## John Pehrson

## Launching Children to Successful Futures

Since he retired 15 years ago, John Pehrson has aimed his open mind, strategic planning skills, and common sense leadership toward making a difference in schools and education. John passionately believes that all children can succeed if they are given the right tools and experiences. “It’s not rocket science,” he likes to remind his colleagues, “and I should know.”

An engineer and executive with Boeing for 33 years, John knows about the complex systems and myriad pieces that contribute to building and launching rockets. And while helping all children succeed at school often seems like an insurmountable task, he refuses to believe it is that complicated. John believes it is a matter of public will and commitment to make education a priority.

John’s volunteer leadership started in his 30’s as head of the Bellevue PTA. He also headed an advisory committee for Bellevue Schools and served on the Bellevue School Board. After retiring from Boeing in 1988 he joined the Executive Service Corps of Washington, where he works with principals and superintendents to improve their schools. He attended The Confluence in 1999 and 2000, looking to partner with other community and business leaders to improve education.



John Pehrson

Confluence 2000 focused on the theme of “Uniting to End Poverty.” John identified education as a key leverage point for helping families and children escape the cycle of poverty, and banded with other members to form the group HOPE.

I can’t help but think when I see young men hanging around downtown at two in the afternoon that education is a way out of poverty. It may be the only way.

“If you give kids a good education and the right skills, you give them a better chance at life,” John said from a coffee shop in the Belltown neighborhood where he lives. “I can’t help but think when I see young men hanging around downtown at two in the afternoon that education is a way out of poverty. It may be the only way.”

As John talks, several people walk by the coffee shop window and wave to him. He is a neighborhood leader here, and uses the coffee shop as his headquarters for working on projects and meeting coconspirators who wish to improve education, community and the world.

Three years after it formed, the HOPE group still meets. John and other members thrive on learning from each other and discovering ways to support education as a way out of poverty. With new members joining each year, the group has included representatives from

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Powerful Schools, the City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods and the Department of Human Services, the Mayor's office, the Institute for K-12 Leadership at the University of Washington, and the League of Education Voters.

One HOPE member and fellow Confluence participant was Mary Jean Ryan from the City of Seattle Mayor's Office. She helped John win an appointment to the influential Levy Oversight Committee that plans and guides the city's Family and Education Levy.

The Family and Education Levy is a funding vehicle that has infused \$10 million per year for the last 14 years to help students succeed in school through support to children and families. It comes up for a vote every seven years.

The Levy Oversight Committee consists of the Seattle mayor and City Council chair, the Seattle School District superintendent, a school board representative, and three community members. The committee recommends to the mayor how to submit the levy to voters, and provides oversight on the allocation and expenditure of levy funds.

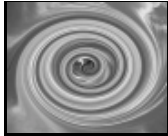
For John, it was an exciting promotion in his volunteer career, and a capstone achievement of his 50-year passion for improving education. "This is a huge opportunity and very consistent with my passion," he said. "I think I'm adding real value. I listen, I have time, and I don't just accept the agenda without thinking. I try to represent the average person's interests on the committee."

John traces his appointment directly to The Confluence. "Mary Jean lobbied to get me on the committee when there were more visible candidates," John said. "It would not have happened without the relationship we built through The Confluence and HOPE."

John, who recently stepped off the Center for Ethical Leadership Board where he served for nine years, has joined the Pike Place Market Foundation Board and the Belltown Land Use and Housing Committee. In all of his community roles, John relies on connections he made at The Confluence to pursue his vision.

"It's just remarkable what The Confluence does," he said. "It makes connections that weren't there before among people who are very different. The people on HOPE don't always agree, but they are all fascinating people who stay together to learn from each other and try to do something about education."

In the year 2004, space travel is now a common and generally successful industry. Public education has not enjoyed the same level of visible success. It might not be rocket science to help every child succeed, but John says the time has come to give public education the same level of public commitment and resources as we give the space program. If we can put a man on the moon, we can help children learn, he says. And it probably won't hurt to have a rocket scientist leading the way.



## Larry Gossett

## Bringing Hope To Seattle's Underclass

**F**or 35 years Larry Gossett has been on a crusade to improve the lives of the poorest and most alienated members of the greater Seattle community.



Larry Gossett

Growing up in the Central Area, he later founded the Black Student Union at the University of Washington, which helped establish an affirmative action program in the late 1960's. This action led to thousands of students of color being admitted and over 29,000 African American, Native American,

Latino and Asian and Pacific Islander graduates in the next 25 years.

For 14 years he was Director of the Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP), where he tried to understand and eradicate the "confounding and complex" problem of poverty. And for the past ten years Larry has served on the King County Council representing District Ten, which stretches across core Seattle neighborhoods from the University District to Rainier Valley.

So it was no surprise that when Confluence 2000 was held, with the focus on "Uniting to End Poverty," Larry would be in attendance.

"I've been to a lot of conferences dealing with economic justice and empowerment of the poor," he said. "But at The Confluence there were many new issue groups represented and several people I hadn't met. There was a good diversity of people, including grassroots, university professors - those who write and articulate about the human service

arena and those who live in it. There was a lot of food for thought put on the table."

Larry is a soft-spoken man whose passion for justice is expressed not with vehemence, but through a steady reminder of history and current facts. For example, the Civil Rights work of the 60's and 70's raised awareness and ended some of the more overt elements of racism in society, Larry says, but it didn't get them all. Today's efforts to eradicate racism and the related issues of poverty are more challenging because the racism is more difficult to see, he said.

"Many people put the weight burden on those who have been victimized to pull themselves out," he said. "People who are desperate will strike out at one another - that's what oppressed people do. But those are symptoms, not causes. There is too much emphasis on the poor getting themselves together when the real issue is root causes such as racism, the economic system and the criminal justice system."

At The Confluence Larry met with several people with direct experience with poverty and those from low-income communities. With his encouragement, they formed a group called the People's Mobilization Coalition of King County. The group set out to assemble a coalition of individuals under the theme of "Jobs, Not Jails for Youth."

This became the theme for the 2001 Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade, which was attended by thousands. This success, although small compared to the work left to do, energized many of the parade participants.

"Most people don't lose sleep over the fact that one-third of our black youngsters are living completely outside the mainstream," he said. "They live in households at

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or below the poverty level, go to under-funded inner city schools and score poorly on tests. They are isolated, powerless and have a great sense of hopelessness. We need to create opportunities, such as a livable wage, to end this underclass and give these 20 and 21-year olds a chance.”

Larry believes there has been little true progress in helping people out of the poverty cycle permanently. While the actual numbers of African Americans living in poverty in this country have been cut nearly in half since 1956, those still in poverty are much worse off than they were 30 or 40 years ago, he said.

“Those who are poor are much poorer and more isolated from the population as a whole, even from the black community,” Larry said. “With the expansion of a black middle class, the gap between the black poor and the middle class has grown. There is still a disproportionate number of African Americans and people of color living in poverty when compared to the population as a whole.”

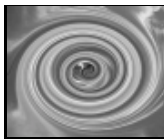
During The Confluence, Larry used his knowledge and skills to explore creative alternatives with other leaders who care about ending poverty. Several groups organized at The Confluence were influenced by Larry’s insistence that real change will come by engaging the public’s will and support to end poverty.

“At The Confluence we had the opportunity to dialogue with people from diverse sectors of the population on these seemingly intractable problems,” he said. “People working on the same issues can mitigate against the spread of poverty in this wealthy nation. It’s good to get away from the day-to-day activities and think about the big picture, get reenergized, and pull from more resources than you had before you came.”

“The Confluence is a coming together - many streams into one,” he said. “This is exactly what we need - the more people working on these issues the better.”

Many people put the weight burden on those who have been victimized to pull themselves out. People who are desperate will strike out at one another – that’s what oppressed people do.





## Tammi Sims

## Building Diverse Communities

**T**ammi Sims devotes much of her time to helping individuals with developmental disabilities be successful in the world. After eight years of intense work, she was looking for new ways to think about building diverse communities when she heard about the Center for Ethical Leadership and The Confluence.

The Confluence, with the theme of “Exploring the Common Good: Building Communities That Work for All,” drew her immediately. She hoped to gain philosophies, strategies and tools for building diverse communities. Most of all, she wanted to test her own theory that a diverse community begins with individuals being comfortable with difference.

“I think people need to sort through their assumptions about differences and have some kind of spiritual awakening to be able to see people as having equal gifts,” Tammi said. “Being able to look in a meaningful way, without pity, at people with developmental disabilities starts with personal openness and a willingness to see the possibility, potential and equality in everyone.”

Tammi is a slight, athletic woman who lives in Bellevue with her husband Chris and Steve, a man with developmental disabilities, as part of the Companion Home program. She speaks softly but firmly about her vision for building diverse communities.

“I have a strong value and desire to see people with developmental disabilities welcomed and included,” she said. “I have felt what it’s like not to belong. Developmentally disabled people are at times physically separated and it’s rare that disability is included in conversations about diverse community building.”

Tammi attended The Confluence with Lois, a woman with developmental disabilities Tammi knew through her work at Total Living Concept. Tammi admitted she felt protective of Lois at first, and watched to see if other participants would welcome Lois or be patronizing toward her.



Tammi Sims

“I tried not to interfere with her experience or others’ experience of her,” Tammi said. “Her group included her and helped her take care of her health issues. They

went hiking and later some of them told me Lois brought things alive for them they wouldn’t have noticed had she not been along.”

One of Tammi’s critical learning moments occurred during the summary session, when others at the conference included Lois and referred to her ideas three different times. “It was a healing moment for me,” Tammi recalled. “Their actions told me that these were people who had done the personal work to open their hearts to people who are different. It affirmed for me that this is where the work of diversity begins – to help people arrive at that open place.”

Another breakthrough came while Tammi sat in sessions exploring concepts of community and diversity with other Confluence members, and realized Lois was in the kitchen taking pictures of the staff to add to her scrap book.

“She was not engaged in this heady conversation of diverse communities – she

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was out doing it,” Tammi said. “She made no distinction between the staff and the participants of the event. To her they were all part of a wonderful weekend and she wanted to thank each one. She reminded the rest of us not to construct false boundaries if building community is your intention.”

Weeks after The Confluence Tammi ran into a fellow participant who asked her about the societal assumption that being in a relationship with a person with developmental disabilities requires giving, while the other primarily receives.

“I was amazed that of all the things she could have been ruminating on for weeks after a three-day event, it was this question of disability,” Tammi said. “People usually think that being in a relationship with a developmentally disabled person is all energy in, and not a lot back. But people with developmental disabilities often have the most to teach us about what we’re trying to do. They listen deeper, converse differently, and the values of status, jobs, and money don’t mean as much to them. They value the basic truths of honesty, being in the moment, and friendship.”

Tammi’s experience at The Confluence has had a lasting impact on her work at Total

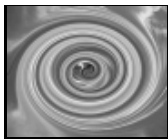
Living Concept. She has opened all of their workshops to the general community to engage a broader audience in creating diverse communities. She even brought in fellow Confluence participant Tita Begashaw to lead the group in laughter therapy.

I realized you can’t go too far down the line of community building with one group of people in mind. That would be hypocrisy and just encourage segregation. I want to broaden the conversation and be a resource for people on that path to openness.

“Before we hosted workshops for people with developmental disabilities, professionals and family members, but we were just preaching to the choir,” Tammi said. “Building diverse communities is not

about preparing people with disabilities to live in the mainstream – they are ready. They are waiting for the invitation. Building diverse communities is about educating people in community about how to be open to difference, and how to see and delight in what people with disabilities have to offer.

“I realized you can’t go too far down the line of community building with one group of people in mind,” she said. “That would be hypocrisy and just encourage segregation. I want to broaden the conversation and be a resource for people on that path to openness. I feel very lucky to have such a pocket of people to draw from by participating in The Confluence.”



**Victor  
Bremson**

## In Search Of Cultural Change

**V**ictor Bremson is searching for something. He looked for it in his work as a turn-around consultant for businesses. Then he looked in a national organization called BALLE - Business Alliance for Local Living Economies. His search took him through a Doctor of Ministry program at Matthew Fox's University of Creation Spirituality, and in April 2002, to The Confluence.

Victor is a student of cultural change. He considers his words carefully, weighing his thoughts in the moment. He listens attentively to others' comments, pausing before giving a response, and invariably takes the conversation deeper.

Victor is searching for a community of people he can learn with. He has studied open systems, living systems and emergence. He is involved in organizations where he can experiment in applying these theories to human systems and organizations. He believes that people who can truly listen and learn from each other, and tell their stories of change, will eventually change the world for the better.



Victor Bremson

"There is great power in story telling to change a culture," Victor said. "Stories can move people from reliance on an old system to embrace a new one. Stories can show how change happens subtly, over time. Stories show that we are all interconnected."

His dissertation was a compilation of such stories, mostly about small business owners who built community while building their business. His research took him from Pike Place Market, Shore Bank and Third Place Books to a bakery in Yonkers, New York, a public market in North Carolina and a housing development in Chicago. In every case, he said, he couldn't tell the difference from when he was at the business or the person's home.

"These people are all experimenting with how to be successful entrepreneurs while breathing life into the local economy and community," Victor said. "The book on local living economies hasn't been written yet. But one thing they all have in common is that they lead very integrated lives."

At the White Dog Café in Philadelphia, for example, the owner "served good food and entertainment to seduce her customers into social action." Victor recalled. "She sent six busloads to Washington D.C. to march for peace. She knows something about how to create cultural change."

Victor was attracted to The Confluence, with its focus on "Building Communities that Work for All." The Confluence seemed to him a place to find kindred spirits and a learning community. He joined the design team, a group of eight diverse individuals who dialogued for months about the topic and ways to make the event embody community building.

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“The design team came the closest to a learning community and taught me something about my comfort with emergence,” he said. “I became pretty attached to the outcomes and had to let go of that to really experience what I was there to learn.”

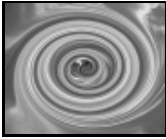
During the three-day event Victor met several people he keeps in touch with, “plotting to change the world.” “We are supportive of each others’ worlds,” he said. “The Confluence helped me to find like minded people. There was a great convergence that helped me feel safer in what I’m trying to do. They have become part of my circle.”

Rage eliminates the possibility of an open dialogue. We get attached to ideas and anger reinforces our attachment. I want to learn how to get beyond this so I can teach others to do the same.

At the core of Victor’s work is helping himself and other people get beyond anger, hatred and rage, to connect with ideas and possibilities. “Rage eliminates the possibility of an open dialogue. We get attached to ideas and anger reinforces our attachment. I want to learn how to get beyond this so I can teach others to do the same.”

For Victor, The Confluence was a laboratory for the type of listening and learning he is searching for. He learned some truths about his own willingness to engage with openness, and of the readiness others feel. It was another step in his search, which is not yet complete.

“I feel great hope for the future because I keep meeting amazing people – including those at The Confluence – wherever I go. This search is about how to create cultural change, one story at a time.”



**A**t a convention for the National Education Association several years ago, Roger Erskine took the stage to receive an award minutes after Reverend Jesse Jackson spoke. The crowd was distracted after Reverend Jackson's talk and many were on the way out the door when Roger started to speak passionately about making a difference for kids in schools that are chronically underserved.



Roger Erskine

“Jesse Jackson said to me, ‘You froze those people at the door and they came back in. You’re doing a hell of a job keeping hope alive.’”

Roger recalls this moment in his 40 years of education reform work as a light that shines brightly on his mission. “It’s all about hope,” he said. “These kids have had their hopes dashed so many times and society starts to think it is okay that some communities remain underserved. But it’s not okay and we can fix it.”

This attitude led him to develop a tool called the Power Holder Analysis while he was the manager of Organizational Development at the NEA. The analysis is a research tool that determines what the local “movers and shakers” think is needed in education. Education unions can then work with the stakeholders on an agenda for change. The process was replicated in 50 cities across the country, including Seattle. But only in Seattle were 80 percent of the power holders also graduates of the public schools.

“When I spoke to the downtown Rotary and reminded them what a great school district Seattle was, everyone nodded their heads because they had been there,” he recalled. “Here we had a chance to plug the power holders into improving education. You can be a critic, or you can be a critical friend. For change to happen, we needed their critical friendship.”

Roger subsequently started the K-12 Institute at the University of Washington. When he was invited to lead the organization, he jumped at the chance.

“My good hearted friend John Stanford (former School Superintendent) had started to think about weighted student formulas to give more resources to underserved schools, but we also knew it was not just about money. Jobs, housing, and a living wage are part of the mosaic of ending poverty, and education is one part of that mosaic. We needed a wider conversation as a community to make sure no child got left behind in our public schools.”

At just the right time, Roger heard about Confluence 2000, with its focus on “Uniting to End Poverty.” Here was his opportunity to start that conversation. “I was hopeful The Confluence would bring together advocates for ending poverty from different vantage points, and it did. I knew if I could get to the kinds of people that were on the invite list, we could make a difference.”

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During the three-day event, Roger spoke with people from the religious community, social service and government agencies, several formerly homeless individuals, and those still living in low-income brackets.

“It was so good to see all the people committed to creating a better world in a sustaining way for those living in poverty,” he said. “I was doing my piece of the mosaic, but I was missing the whole community. There are so many pieces in the mosaic that have to be in place. It really does take a village to raise a child.”

One of the primary products from The Confluence was the “poverty map,” a colorful graphic depicting dozens of elements that conspire to keep someone in the poverty cycle, and those elements that can help them out.

In the months and years that followed, Roger took the map to cities across the state he was working with on education reform. He gave it to the Gates Foundation, groups in Cincinnati and Pennsylvania, and to members of the national Teacher Union Reform Network, which he cofounded six years ago.

“I’ve never had anybody I’ve given this to not say ‘wow,’” he said, a twinkle in his eye as he recalled the hundreds of color copies he handed out to eager recipients. “Then they look at it more closely and say ‘WOW!’”

Roger was impressed by the “good thinkers” at The Confluence who could strategize about ending poverty on many different levels, and joined with a group of leaders to focus on education as a leverage point for ending poverty. This group called themselves

HOPE, and continues to meet to support education reform projects.

But what Roger didn’t expect from The Confluence was the deep personal renewal he felt around his life work.

“The Confluence changed my life,” he said. “It deepened my commitment and rekindled my beliefs and passions.

I realized it was okay to wear this on my sleeve, not in an angry aggressive way, but knowing others would hang it on their sleeves and together we could make some improvement.”

He got goose bumps when he told his wife about the event.

“In my 40 years in education I’ve been to a lot of meetings,” he said. “This was the best meeting and the best facilitated conference I’ve ever been to. I found a core of people in this city working on the whole mosaic, and it gave me inspiration and hope that this can work. I no longer felt I was functioning in a vacuum.”

Roger speaks softly but directly, his light blue eyes steady and his cheeks turning pink as his passion finds its voice. Now retired, Roger spends his time volunteering for significant education initiatives, and recently moved to Olympia to be closer to legislative action.

He is currently working with Governor Locke and the League of Education Voters, which he and others founded a few years ago after Initiative 728 was rolled back. The League is preparing a \$1 billion package that could revolutionize public education; from early childhood development through higher education.

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“We offer a half day of kindergarten in this state and that is morally wrong,” Roger said. “Our kids are doing better in high school but when they finish they have no place to go or there aren’t enough scholarships, so we have to fix higher education at the same time. It’s extremely ambitious, but,” and he pauses to knock on the wood surface of the table, “if we don’t do something big it’s not worth doing.”

Roger knows from experience that a few extra resources and excellent teachers can make a tremendous difference in the lives of

kids who are barely getting by, and this is what he hopes to achieve in Washington.

“We’ve shown time and again that if we give our kids the best education, they will succeed, and all the members in society will prosper,” he said. “This project is about keeping hope alive and staying connected with our most valuable resource: our future.”



*Rabbi Beth Singer and Nina Valerio team up for a group exercise at Confluence 2002*



*Seattle City Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck and Pastor Rich Lang share a laugh at Confluence 2002*



*Bev Spears and Victor Bremson in a laughing exercise at Confluence 2002*



*A 2002 Confluence team wraps up a long work session with a smile*





# New Networks and Connections

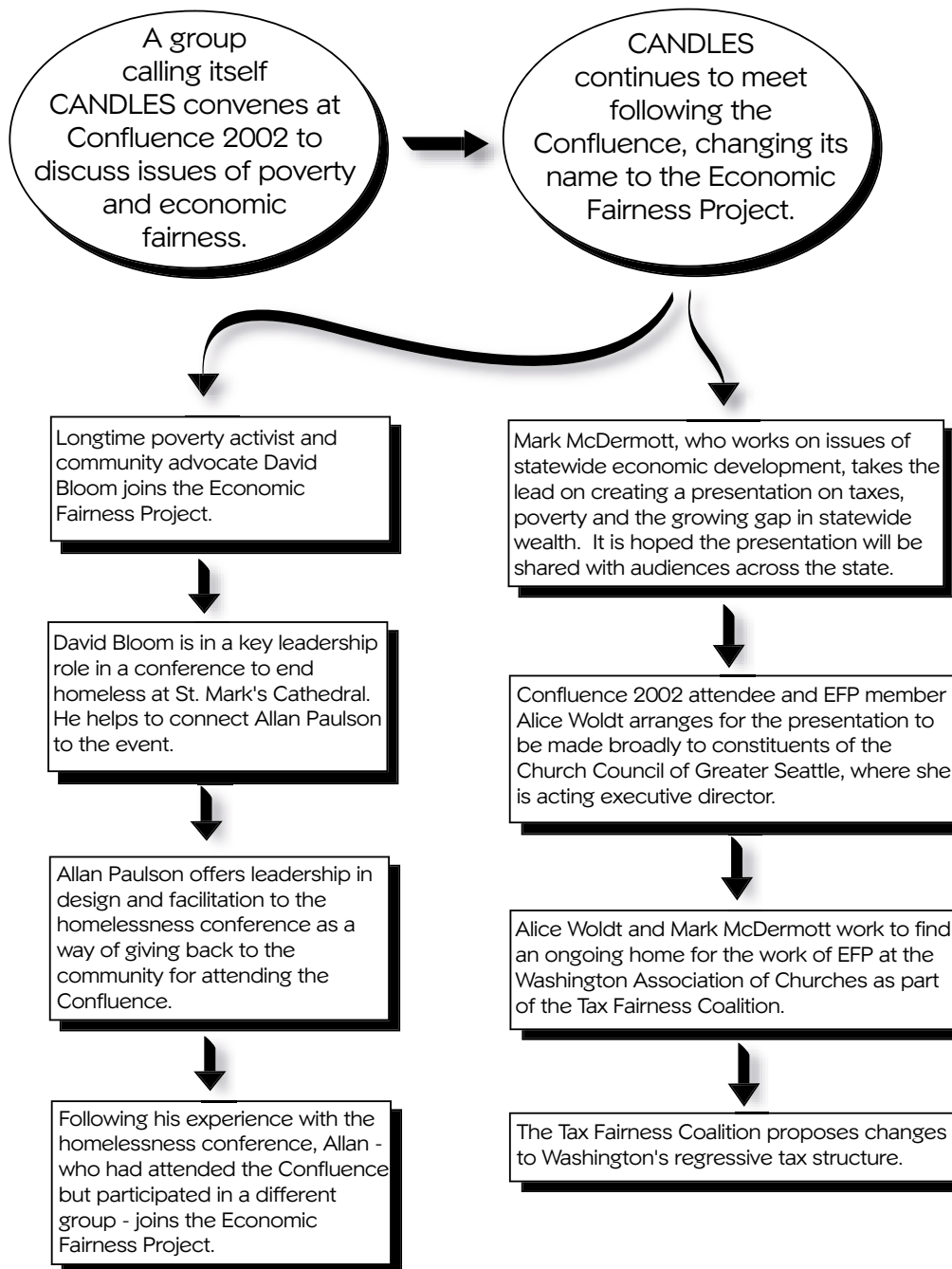
The Confluence invites the broadest and most diverse group of people possible. The assumption behind this approach is that busy people often do not have the opportunity to get out of their regular work and social circles to meet others who share their interests. The three-day Confluence event is designed to maximize the formation of new networks, so that participants can generate new ideas and form new partnerships that will help them realize their goals for social change.

We like to call these new partnerships “collisions of possibility,” because anything is possible when strangers come together with a willingness to share and learn from each other. In this section, participants describe the surprising connections they made during The Confluence and how these have shaped their work after the event.

## In This Section

Barbara Trites .....	35
Dannette Allen .....	37
Eskinder Sarka .....	39
Rich Lang .....	41
Verlene Wilder .....	43
David Sando .....	45

# Collisions of Possibility



The Collisions shared here are drawn from the experience of a single work group at Confluence 2002, and demonstrate the powerful synchronicity that can result when passionate people intersect with potent ideas or issues.



## Barbara Trites

## Building Interfaith Communities

Ever since she was a little girl, Barbara Trites has organized people around causes. Whether getting her elementary school friends into an after-school club, working on Norm Rice's mayoral campaign, or directing the revitalization of Tacoma's Union Station, Barbara keeps her eyes on community service.

"I was born with a God-given gift for organizing people and systems and lots of pieces of paper," she said from her home near Green Lake. "I love networking and connecting people. I can see the vision, the details and have an intuition for which path to take. It's like fitting together the pieces of a puzzle."



Barbara Trites

Barbara is a vivacious and engaging woman who has joyously sampled from the eclectic menu of life's possibilities. She has done historic preservation for Pike Place Market, welcomed 1,200 Russian athletes and found homes for them during the Goodwill Games, and through Dale Chihuly's plumber, helped hatch the artist's dream of creating a glass museum.

But she was looking for more than "just another project" while living on Orcas Island a few years ago. She went there to reflect on her life and renew her sense of purpose.

"Every day I pleaded for God to put a light on my path and show me what service I need to do on this earth," she recalled. "I heard a voice - an audible vocational calling - that said it was interfaith work. I trust that."

Interfaith work is bringing people together to cooperate, eliminate misconceptions

and heal the wounds different religions have struggled with for centuries. Barbara's eyes fill with tears as she talks about her work.

"The real reward is seeing a shift between people when they come together and understand each other in a basic human way," she says. "Maybe if we do more of this the world will become a peaceful and just place."

It was her passion for interfaith work and a desire to reintroduce herself into Seattle that led Barbara to The Confluence in 2002, with a focus on "Building Communities That Work for All." Her colleague Jamal Rahman of the Interfaith Community Church told her about it, and she called the Center the next day, "begging

to come."

"The Confluence was a real blessing for me," Barbara said. "After three years on Orcas and two years traveling in South America, it was time to come back to Seattle and find my tribe."

The event, which was held at Sleeping Lady Mountain Retreat in Leavenworth, WA, was a homecoming on many fronts for Barbara. Not only did she meet a dozen people who shared her passion, but she had helped Harriet Bullitt develop the property five years earlier, and was now a guest for the first time. The snug cabins and meeting rooms nestled among the tall pine trees reminded her of her talent for weaving a vision into reality.

During the three day Confluence, Barbara met with others who shared her dream of interfaith peace. "The Confluence helped me know what doors to open and find the players

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interested in interfaith community building,” she said. As past president of the Interfaith Council of Washington, Barbara already had an impressive network, but found “so much juicy stuff in a short amount of time” at The Confluence she left reenergized.

“Whenever I go to something the Center (for Ethical Leadership) sponsors I always make quality connections,” she said. “The Confluence is a place for people with similar interests to find each other and make things happen. Even if they don’t remember me, if I tell someone I’m from The Confluence, they always take my call.”

In the 18 months after The 2002 Confluence, Barbara amassed what is arguably the most diverse and complete database of individuals and organizations interested in interfaith work in the state. She has helped create numerous interfaith events and gatherings, including the Unity Project held one year after September 11, 2001, which is ongoing. She also helped coordinate Mystical Chants, the Bellevue Interfaith Diversity Fair, and a reunion of 50 spiritual organizations. The last she accomplished in just six weeks.

“Meditation guides me in creating a sacred space and time that allows for things to bubble up,” she said. “It looks like magic, but I’m energetically present in a quiet way, acting as a weaver behind the scenes. I feel so called to do this work. How else could I get 110 people from 50 organizations to commit to a day-long event in Arlington with three weeks notice?”

The interfaith work sustains her soul, but Barbara struggles to make it financially sustaining. In countless trips to the library and grant-making resources, she comes up empty handed. It may be the age-old separation of church and state that prevents government agencies from funding community events that include an interfaith mission, or it may be that the interfaith concept isn’t widespread enough yet to attract funders.

“I don’t want to give up my passion of the heart to pay the rent,” she says, her eyes again filling with tears, “but the money just isn’t there. It is so sad because this is so important to our communities. It makes so much more sense to fund efforts to create understanding and prevent violence between faith communities, rather than spend the money to clean up after a mosque or temple has been destroyed.”

But Barbara believes in her calling. She believes something is brewing, and that she will find a way to use her repertoire of resources in a significant and sustainable way. “People who get involved don’t walk away from this work,” she says. “Telling your spiritual story to another person is so compelling and intimate – it’s the essence of yourself and it’s what multi-faith is all about. Everyone seems to want a relationship at that deeper level.”

With her headquarters at “the center of things” near Green Lake and her database humming in the next room, Barbara is poised to combine her personal passion with her organizing and leadership skills and her local and global connections.

“The magic will happen,” she says, “Seattle is so open to the deep understandings this work brings, compared to many communities across the country and around the world. If we can’t do it here, where can we?”



## Dannette Allen

## Finding Her Voice for Justice and Compassion

**D**annette Allen believes there are certain words that simply do not belong together, such as homeless and youth, working and poor, child and abuse, and domestic and violence. Sometimes she sits back from her work in the human service field and wonders why, in one of the more liberal, wealthy cities, in the wealthiest country in the world, does society still accept these phrases – and the peoples’ lives they describe – as normal?

As a volunteer with the Seattle Human Services Coalition, she spends a lot of time thinking about children, the elderly, and families without a place to live or enough food to eat. When the opportunity arose to help plan and attend Confluence 2002 with a focus on “Building Communities That Work for All,” she immediately volunteered.

“The idea of building a community with enough compassion to really address these issues, and to motivate people to agree that these things shouldn’t exist anymore was very exciting,” she said.

Dannette hesitates on the judgment inherent in the word “should,” but then plunges forward.

“Hunger and poverty should no longer be an issue in King County,” she said. “Rather than pleading with funders, and asking people to drop coins in a jar at the grocery store, and struggling to get people to pay attention, how can we generate compassion that is sustainable – that gets people to act in a consistent way so we resolve these issues once and for all?”

A quiet, direct woman who favors colorful berets crowning her tight black braids, Dannette is a complex combination of idealism and realism. She knows there are real barriers to breaking cycles of poverty and child abuse. But she has dedicated her adult life to this work, and remains hopeful that her dream will be realized.



Dannette Allen

In her former work at the Meals Partnership Coalition, Dannette provided support to 105 meal providers that serve 3.2 million meals per year in King County. That’s nearly 9,000 meals per day. The Confluence gave her an opportunity to think systemically with other commu-

nity leaders about how to get to the root of these issues.

“There was such a mix of people with different backgrounds and perspectives and we had a chance to work together at a much deeper level than usual,” she recalled. “We need leaders who are centered on these issues, who think about creating compassion and who can impact a whole network of other people.”

But Dannette’s real breakthrough was reflecting on her own role in creating a just and compassionate community. After years of working to address painful social issues of others, she found her public voice to address the issue of her own abuse at The Confluence.

“The Confluence has had a lasting impact on my life and work,” she said. “I had the opportunity to reflect on the role I would take to bring healing to the community. My tendency was to remain silent about my experi-

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ence of abuse. But I have never known silence to be an effective tool in the creation of justice and compassion.”

At the event Dannette talked in depth with David Sando, an engineer at Boeing who helped design The Confluence. He was taken with Dannette’s straightforward passion and her dream to end the suffering and pain caused by abuse. Sometime during the three days, he decided to adopt her cause and provide support to Dannette’s idea, called “Tending the Garden.”

The project will promote healing and growth from physical, verbal and emotional abuse through written works, a video and a travelling installation of artwork and gardens. “Tending the Garden” will turn the pain of abuse into hope, healing and strength. Already the project is stronger because Dannette found the courage to speak up.

“The biggest impact of The Confluence was to publicly state my idea and meet David,” Dannette said. “His presence and support have helped me focus. His belief in the project, and the spirit, energy and time he has committed are priceless. It is beyond words.”

She also met Larry Daloz of the Whidbey Institute who gave her a metaphor to frame the project with a life-giving message. Larry drew a picture of a complete ecosystem, with towering trees fed by sunlight, and rain and a special mushroom that added nutrients to the soil. Dannette was struck by the mushroom, and with the notion that a community thrives on elements that are often overlooked.

“We don’t often think about the role of the mushroom in community,” she said. “A healthy community needs all of its elements to thrive. What really feeds a community? What really helps an individual to grow? Is a scholarship enough? Is housing? That may not be enough if the person has been abused, is sick, unemployed or trying to support children. What someone needs to be healthy may be more complex, and what a community needs to be healthy is the many, small inter-connections we often take for granted.”

With David’s help, Dannette has grown the Tending the Garden idea into a full project, now entitled, “Life In Dirt: The Devastation of Abuse and the Journey Towards Healing.” Dannette seeks others on the journey to end abuse who can help her grow the idea.

“There is a saying that ‘There can never be peace and justice for me unless there is peace and justice for you,’” Dannette said. “Therefore I must seek an end to the suffering and pain caused by abuse not just for myself, but for others as well.”

Because of The Confluence, Dannette introduced new meaning into her life and work. This meaning is represented by words that belong together, like compassion and community, kindness and strangers. With a stronger, clearer voice, she is ready to continue her work for justice and peace.



## Eskinder Sarka

## Uniting African Values With American Dreams

**T**hirteen years ago Eskinder Sarka set foot on American soil for the first time. He arrived from Ethiopia to fulfill his father's greatest wish for his sons – to have a better life than was possible in the home country.



Eskinder Sarka

Torn by famine, war and government oppression, Ethiopia couldn't begin to fulfill Eskinder's potential and his dreams. Knowing no one but his brother and the generous family that sponsored him, Eskinder came to the United States, finished college, made a home in Seattle and got a job parking cars.

In Ethiopia, he would have stayed in that job his whole life. But his leadership ability quickly earned him a promotion to manager, which helped fund his graduate degree at the University of Washington. He is now the Executive Director at the Horn of Africa, a nonprofit organization that serves refugees and immigrants from Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

"In Ethiopia people are tight-knit and very genuine," he said. "It isn't the same here where people move very fast and are more interested in making it to a higher level. But there are trade-offs. Here you can do anything you want. You are free to be who you are, with unlimited possibilities, and there is no place in the world that can beat that."

At the Horn of Africa offices located in the Rainier neighborhood, Eskinder helps people like himself find their way in a new country. Learning the language and job skills, navigating the school and government systems, and finding housing are critical to newly arrived Africans. He knows from experience that if you don't have help through this transition, you might not make it. Having a supportive community is critical to the success of these new citizens.

He had been the Horn of Africa director for 18 months when he received an invitation to join The Confluence 2002, with its focus on "Building Communities That Work for All."

The timing was perfect in some ways, dreadful in others. When the phone call came, his office was on fire. Smoke poured through the white ceiling tiles, blackening the walls and chasing the students from the computer lab into the parking lot. He rescued some files and temporarily relocated the office to High Point. He figured there was no way he could take three days in the midst of this crisis to discuss community building.

A tall man with an engaging, direct smile, Eskinder pauses with his hand on his chin, looking at the improvements to the office since the fire and recalling the tense situation.

"But at the same time I was very curious about The Confluence and thought that sharing about my organization would be worthwhile," he said. "I wanted to make connections with

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city officials, previous and potential donors and other organizations trying to build community.”

So even though his wife was pregnant with their first child and he had a thousand other things to do, Eskinder attended Confluence 2002. It was like nothing he had ever experienced.

Expecting a “typical business meeting” where people would share strategic thinking and do some networking, Eskinder quickly realized The Confluence was a place to engage with people on many different levels.

“I’ve never been in that kind of environment where people are so willing to share and learn,” he said. “It was part formal, part informal, part spiritual, part business, but all of it was very relaxing and renewing. The environment allowed me to think more clearly, free from paperwork, computers, and television. It was an opportunity to express what community means to me and share that with others.”

Top on Eskinder’s list of benefits from The Confluence was the concept of the common good. It appealed to Eskinder because it reminded him of his Ethiopian roots. But hearing it for the first time in the United States, he realized that the people he thought were so different from him had very similar cares and goals.

“It’s not a level playing field,” he said, “which can make you believe you don’t have things in common with people. But at The Confluence I got so moved that everyone is human, that we all want the same thing, and that at the bottom of our hearts we share common ground. It may get translated in different ways, but in the end we have more experiences in common than different. The people there allowed themselves to be genuine with each other; they weren’t just there for business.”

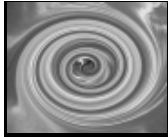
One of the important connections Eskinder made was with Yvonne Sanchez, the newly appointed director of the City of Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods. The department had been a funder of Horn of Africa programs, but with a new director, Eskinder was worried for the future of his organization. He found himself at lunch with Yvonne without realizing who she was. An hour later they had formed a relationship, and a commitment to work together to sustain HOA programming.

Eskinder also met new contacts at Boeing for potential funding and from the White Center community, where he hopes to broaden HOA’s services to the African immigrant community.

Back in Africa the countries of Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia are often in conflict, but here they have an opportunity to start fresh. “The East African communities have many political problems and as long as those persist back home, people believe there can’t be peace here,” he said. “But we are here now, and we need to talk between our communities and resolve the problems we have in common that can be solved.

“Just like at The Confluence, people from East African communities don’t always agree, but everyone has a concern about building a strong and safe community and making a difference for their family,” he said. “We are all change agents, even if we are in different streams. When I think of The Confluence, I get a warm feeling because it represents all we are trying to do here.”





**Rich  
Lang**

## Binding People Together For Peace

**W**hen Rich Lang arrived from Spokane to serve as minister at Trinity United Methodist Church, the city of Seattle posed a complicated maze to negotiate – religiously, politically, and geographically.

“When you are in a position of leadership you want to get things done,” he said from the historic sitting room of the church in Ballard. “But getting things done depends on who you know, what you know and what doors are open to you. I didn’t know who to talk to or how to get things done.”

An outgoing, youthful pastor with a comedian’s timing and wit, Rich jumped at the invitation to attend Confluence 2002, with its focus on “Building Communities That Work for All.” Two years into his new ministry, he hoped to find others working for peace, connect with local leaders and learn more about his new community.

It was during a routine afternoon presentation that he unleashed his talent for bringing people together. He jumped onto a table and began to sing his group’s report, making up words on the spot. As he beseeched the 60 participants to “give peace a chance,” the crowd was won over by his energy, humor and gutsy performance.

Rich grins and shakes his head at the memory. But the risk-taking and fun-loving part of his personality is precisely what attracts people to work with him. The Confluence was a terrific investment, he says, because not only did he learn how to negotiate the complex systems of Seattle and

strengthen his leadership capacity, he developed a fertile network of kindred spirits. Two of these were fellow religious leaders passionate about interfaith community building.

“I believe our work as religious leaders is to model how to get along,” Rich said. “There is a move for religions to go inward, but the commonwealth needs the religious community in the marketplace of ideas and action. We need to be in the system for the common good to be created. The role of religion is to help build neighborhoods and bring the community together.”



Rich Lang

The Confluence was held seven months after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and tangible tension remained

in the community and between religions. At The Confluence Rich met Rabbi Beth Singer of Temple Beth AM and Jamal Rahman of the Interfaith Community Church. During long walks and talks, they explored theology, discovered shared goals, and developed friendships. Eight months later they delivered a special interfaith service on Christmas Eve, entitled “Peaceful Coexistence Among all the Children of Abraham,” for their congregations and interested community members.

“This was definitely a risky thing to do, having a Jewish Rabbi and Muslim leader come to my church to preach,” Rich said. “We could do it because there was a basic trust built at The Confluence that empowered us to go beyond our roles, go to deeper levels and do real work. Trust isn’t created by ideas; it is created through action and is built out of relationships. This event was an important sign to our constituents to make bridges

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rather than take sides. It was a multi-faith call to moral idealism.”

The multifaith service was just one of the substantial rewards that came from the connections Rich established through The Confluence. Recalling that the word “religion”

means to *bind together*, Rich made several friends during the three days with people he would never have had the opportunity to meet through the normal course of his work.

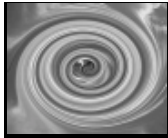
He got involved in BALLE – Business Alliance for Local Living Economies – and still walks around Green Lake with BALLE coordinator Victor Bremson. “Having an ecological consciousness and lifestyle is a major part of

...there was a basic trust built at The Confluence that empowered us to go beyond our roles, go to deeper levels and do real work. Trust isn’t created by ideas; it is created through action and is built out of relationships.

my theology and something I’m trying to bring more into my ministry,” Rich said.

He also connected with Rebecca Sandel and through his church gave her \$20,000 worth of computers at the Phinney Neighborhood Center. He has new friends at the Leadership Institute of Seattle, United Way, the City of Seattle and other businesses and nonprofit organizations.

“I met so many people at a friend level, and even if I don’t keep in steady contact with all of them, I know what they do and know where they are,” Rich said. “If I need to pull on that rope to get something done for community or peace, I know they will respond.”



**Verlene  
Wilder**

## Getting Organized For Justice

**F**or most people, getting organized means they remember where they put the car keys, remove clutter or make a to-do list. For Verlene Wilder, getting organized means promoting social and economic justice. Getting organized means helping people who typically don't have a voice on important issues. Getting organized is her life work.

Verlene works for the King County Labor Council as the Union Cities Organizer, a position created to bridge the gap between labor unions and community groups interested in issues of justice.



Verlene Wilder

A Union City is a place where “everyone wants to live; where workers make a living wage, decent benefits and have time to be with their families. Union Cities are communities where elected officials are aligned with families on important issues of civil and human rights, workers rights, diversity and social justice,” according to the AFL-CIO.

Acknowledging that many Americans do not enjoy these basic elements of a healthy community, the AFL-CIO founded the Union Cities project to rebuild the union movement from the bottom up, by partnering with diverse community groups.

Verlene helps these groups get organized. With her skill and tenacity, communities and organizations that formerly had no opportunities to work together, are partnering to improve the lives of working families in our city.

A take-charge woman who tends toward bright clothing and dramatic jewelry, Verlene is the consummate “people person.” She moves fast and talks even faster. She juggles dozens of projects with grace and humor. The more she is working on, the more energy she has. But she knows she could not do her job without relationships, and it was this that brought her to The Confluence.

New to her job in 1998, she wanted to meet community leaders from religious, nonprofit and government agencies interested in social and economic justice in King County. The 1999 Confluence, with a focus on “Closing the Income Gap” seemed tailor made for her.

“How else would I have gotten all those people together in one place to talk about this important issue?” she asks from her office in a historic labor building on First Avenue. “They were all interested in addressing job loss and the causes of poverty. I talked to people at breakfast, took walks with others at lunch, and engaged in several activities that enabled us to find each other. By the end of three days we came out agreeing to work on something.”

Verlene attended two more Confluence events in the subsequent three years, making the three-day commitment a priority in her meeting-laden schedule. What she appreciates most about The Confluence is the Gracious Space.

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“The Confluence provides a place and time for me to reflect on my work, listen to people and form relationships,” she said. “I’m very goal oriented, but I need this time to reflect and get to know other people. Diverse voices need to be part of my plan, or it won’t work.”

A former dance instructor with a degree in early child development, Verlène began her organizing career by choreographing children around the dance floor. She later helped negotiate for employees during a significant downsizing event at Group Health where she worked as a technician. She was subsequently tapped to work at the Service Employees Union Local 6.

Verlène brought her organizing prowess to the three Confluence events, and can trace several tangible results from each one. She grins widely as she counts off the coalitions and campaigns that emerged, knowing her job was made that much easier.

During the 1999 Confluence, which occurred one month prior to the WTO meetings in Seattle, she formed a broad coalition with colleagues looking to leverage the WTO event with local mobilization, training and education.

At Confluence 2000, Verlène helped form a group that became part of the local Living Wage Campaign. At Confluence 2002 Verlène organized with others to create a special task force to address race relations in the wake of the events of September 11.

“If there was a Confluence in 2003 I would organize around the immigrant worker issue,” she said. “Next year the big issue will be human rights. There is always something going on where I need to bring unions and communities together. My job is to help people get out of their boxes and provide leadership for important issues. The Confluence is a place where I can talk with diverse groups and come out working with new people to reach these goals.”

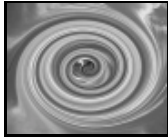
A task-focused, results-oriented person, Verlène used to insist on outcomes at every step of the process. Through The Confluence, she discovered a different, but still powerful, approach for getting things done.

“Now I stop asking for outcomes and let connections and relationships emerge,” she said. “This is a huge paradigm shift for me for getting things done. There is great power in emergence, and The Confluence has been a great resource for this approach.”

Verlène has returned to school for a degree from George Meany Labor College, serves as the Education Coordinator for the national AFL-CIO, speaks frequently to groups on leadership development and the global economy, and plays Mom to two “adults in need.”

“I taught my children that they can’t make an action out of every issue – they have to choose their battle,” she said. “But I don’t listen to my own advice. If you take one thing away, I’ll just replace it with one more. There is too much to do to have free time.”

Verlène will get it all done by being organized, because justice simply isn’t something she can put off until next year.



## David Sando

## Weaving the Threads Of Community & Environment

“I could draw a thread,” says David Sando, his eyes focused on the opposite wall, “that would trace my path to my calling.” That thread, he says, weaves through all three of the Center for Ethical Leadership’s Confluence events.



David Sando

David Sando, like the social change theories he’s so passionate about exploring, is richly complex. Kind and quick to smile, his soft-spokenness and modesty belie a dizzying intelligence and fervent curiosity. He is a runner. He has what

he calls a “magical connection to nature.” And in 2002 he so thoroughly digested the dense intricacies of the *Spiral Dynamics* theory of integral change that his presentation at a national conference caused the theory’s author to well up with pride.

David’s journey began at age six. “There was a huge forest behind my parents’ house,” he says. Then, with a laugh, he confesses, “It was actually the watershed for the sewage treatment center. But that was okay.” Here, in an experience that clearly holds mystical relevance for him, David began his commitment to nature and the environment.

Before he was a teenager, David was writing letters to elected officials in support of establishing the North Cascades National Park and the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Those same passions inspired him to enroll in the *Environment & Community* masters program at Antioch University in 1998. It was during his Antioch experience that he learned of the

Center, and a program called The Confluence which drew his interest in systems thinking.

Confluence 1999, with the theme “Closing the Income Gap,” propelled David closer to his calling. “I was really drawn by the diverse group of people coming together to work on an issue they were all concerned about,” he said. “I began to think about how I could take that same approach to environmental groups.” He also realized that working with the community on issues such as values and ethical leadership could greatly benefit the environment.

David returned for the second Confluence in 2000, this time as an Antioch intern assisting in the design and delivery of the program. Working with the theme “Uniting to End Poverty,” David designed a “poverty systems map” to help people identify and better understand the complex factors creating and perpetuating poverty. It was this experience that caused him to shift from working primarily on environmental issues to working with the community.

When David returned to the third Confluence in 2002, with a focus on Building Communities that Work for All, he took the lead in designing another visual. The *Spiral Flower System Map of Community* became an important tool to help event participants understand a complex social system – this time, the personal and social factors central to the development of community. This was the tool David and Center Director of Community Collaboration Karma Ruder took to the Spiral Dynamics Confab in Dallas, where Spiral Dynamics co-creator Don Beck was so moved to see his theory finding practical application in community.

David is now back on the design team for a fourth Confluence event, focusing this time on building public trust. What is it that keeps drawing him back to the table of diverse individuals to discuss issues of the day?

“I have learned a ton of stuff,” David says of his Confluence experiences. “Mostly I learned how much I still had to learn, and that I’d never stop learning.” David’s responses are modest. At each Confluence he has provided servant leadership to the staff and participants. Somewhere in that process, he discovered an unexpected passion for community.

One of the significant relationships he formed through The Confluence is a partnership with Dannette Allen on a project called “Life in Dirt: The Devastation of Abuse and the Journey Towards Healing.” David was inspired by Dannette’s vision of helping heal the pain of abuse, and has supported the launch of the project over the last two years.

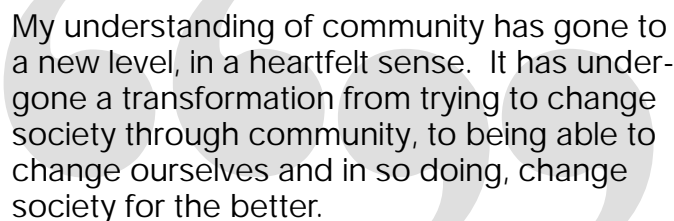
He also got involved in a small nonprofit organization named EcoSolutions, which is

developing a regional model for improving stream habitats by working with streamside owners on issues such as pesticide and landscaping runoff.

David says the most important thing he gained from his Confluence experience is lasting connections with people he would never have met otherwise.

“My understanding of community has gone to a new level, in a heartfelt sense,” he said. “It has undergone a transformation from trying to change society through community, to being able to change ourselves and in so doing, change society for the better.”

The calling he heard while at The Confluence has grown to a new understanding of his role in community. “I’m now serving others who have a passion for people and planet, and are working for the common good. The Confluence is a torch that lights the dark nooks and crannies in all of us and in our institutions, so we can reflect, and act on, what we have either neglected or have not seen before.”



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# Leadership Tools and Approaches

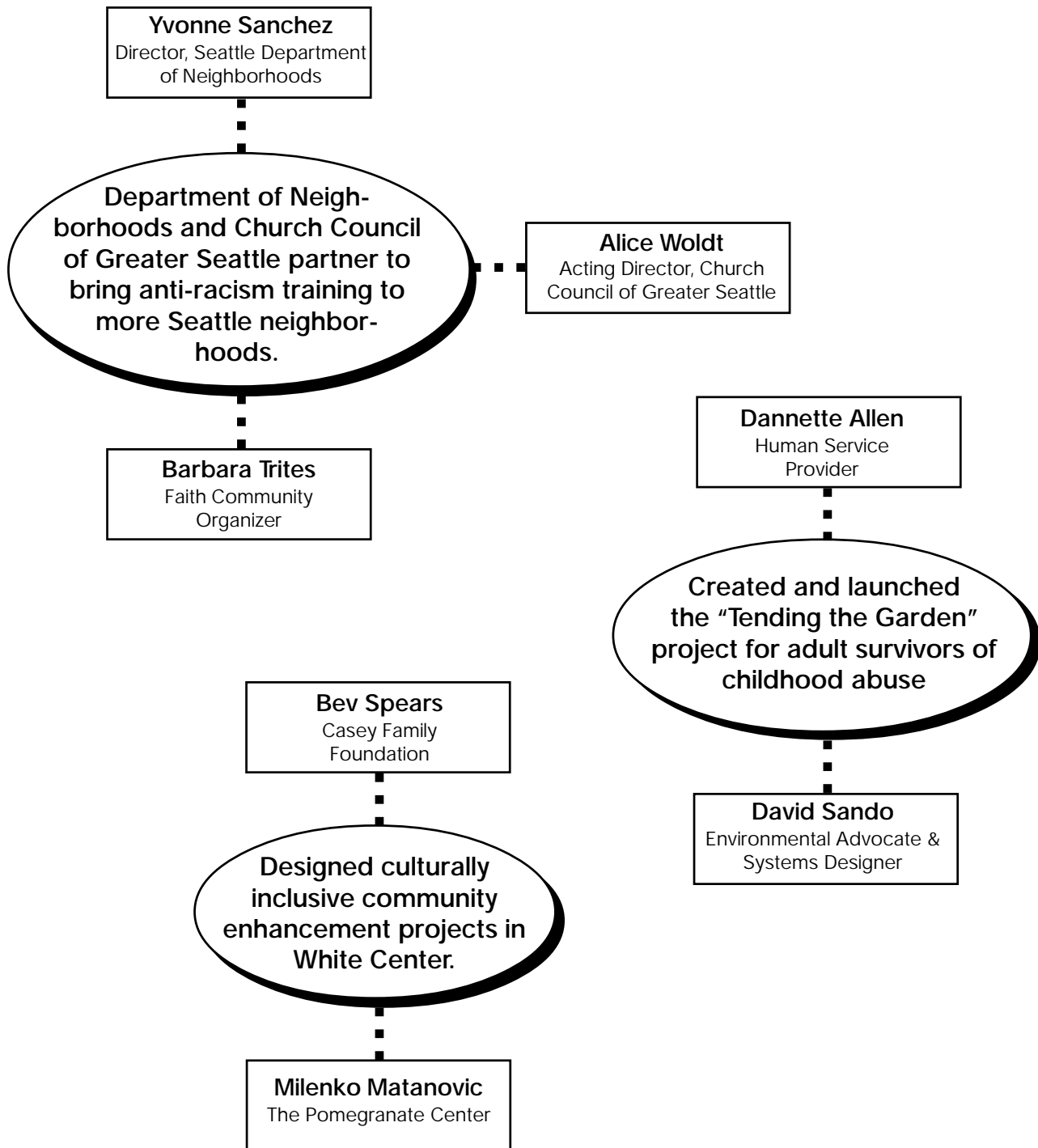
An important aspect of The Confluence is the role of leadership. The Center for Ethical Leadership and partners of The Confluence believe everyone can be a leader, and that with effective tools, these leaders can be successful change agents for the greater community.

The Confluence teaches systems and integral thinking, tools for breaking through boundaries and forming authentic collaborations, and strategies for taking action. Many participants at The Confluence say the leadership tools and approaches are the most important take-aways for them. In this section, participants describe the leadership tools and approaches they have used in their work on behalf of the common good.

## In This Section

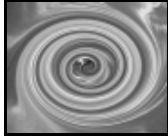
Greg Alvarado .....	49
Linh Thai .....	51
Yvonne Sanchez .....	53
Rebecca Sandel .....	55
Tita Begashaw .....	57

# Collisions of Possibility



Illustrated on this page are several Collisions of Possibility among participants of Confluence 2002.





## Gregory Alvarado

## Leading Teamwork In White Center

**A**t 17, Greg Alvarado already knows the key to getting things done. You have to care about what you're doing, he says, but most importantly, "You can overcome things when you work together. Alone you will have a really hard time."

Greg learned this wisdom through his volunteer work with the Manana Coalition, a Seattle-based association for Latino youth. He has helped produce an annual conference for over 500 Latino youth, and led Manana's effort to publish a regular four-page spread in Latino Northwest Magazine.

Greg noticed right away that these projects don't get done by themselves.

"It's a lot of work," Greg said as he sipped a latte in White Center. "But when everyone works together, everything turns out okay and no one has to do too much."



Gregory Alvarado

Greg is a slight, soft-spoken young man whose straightforward understanding of the benefits of teamwork rivals that of many professionals. It was this wisdom, and his desire to do good work for his community, that earned him an invitation to Confluence 2002, with its focus on "Building Communities That Work for All."

At first, Greg didn't know what a Confluence was. "I had no idea what it was about," he recalls. "But I was really curious. It sounded like an original idea and I wanted to check it out."

When he arrived at Sleeping Lady Mountain Retreat in Leavenworth, WA, for the three day event, he was one of a handful of young people brought together with 60 adults to learn about building community. At first Greg was overwhelmed. Then he learned that a confluence meant a coming together of different streams, and realized he had been invited because of his unique perspective in the Latino community. He realized his "stream" had as much value as anyone's, and he dove in.

"There really is nothing like it anywhere in Seattle," he said. "All across the Seattle community people are trying to do things for their community and most of them are looking for resources. They don't know where to get them. The Confluence is a place to connect with others who are interested in the same things you are, and get those resources."

Greg was fifteen when he attended Confluence 2002. He had some trouble sitting through some of the work group sessions, and noticed the adults were "continuously yapping" about one issue for a long time. He saw his role as helping to move things along.

It was during the breaks and evening events that Greg really made his mark. Talking quietly over a bonfire about growing up in White Center and describing his work with the

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Manana Coalition over lunch, Greg drew the adults into reflective silence. During the final day, Greg charmed the group with a spontaneous poem that described his positive feelings that had emerged among such diverse people.

A trumpet player, singer and composer, Greg was most drawn to the music and laughter that was built into The Confluence. During the first evening the group learned African songs in three parts, then sang in rounds while walking around the room.

“I have flashbacks about walking and singing and coming upon someone else who was singing my part,” he said. “It was fun to identify who was in my group and even though I didn’t know who they were, we were still united.”

Greg also recalls the laughter exercise led by fellow Confluence member Tita Begashaw. Tita, a tiny Ethiopian woman with an infectious giggle, taught the group the value of laughter therapy. She modeled several different types of laughter, such as the “cocktail tee-hee,” the “ice-down-your-back screech,” and the “silent guffaw.” In minutes the group was helplessly bent over, wiping tears from their eyes.

“That was really a highlight,” Greg said, his eyes twinkling at the memory of himself and the adults completely out of control with laughter. “It was like medicine. It makes an excellent icebreaker.”

When Greg returned from The Confluence he shared with his peers at Manana what he learned about building bridges and making connections.

“The main thing I took away was the idea of The Confluence itself,” he said. “Bringing all these different people together in one place so they can help each other out is a powerful concept. In the conference Manana puts on, we use the idea of The Confluence to connect with different student groups across the area. The Confluence reminded me that community building is really important.”

Greg occasionally runs into community leaders who attended The Confluence with him, such as Yvonne Sanchez who directs the city of Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods, and Estella Ortega from El Centro de la Raza.

“It’s fun to run into people and say ‘Hey I met you at The Confluence.’ It’s easy to reestablish a connection. You can ask what they are working on and even if you didn’t need resources at The Confluence, you might need them now. And these are people I know I can ask if I need something.”

Greg Alvarado was a leader in his community before he attended The Confluence. But that experience gave him more confidence to his voice his concerns and passions, especially in the world of adults and the world outside White Center. And he knows where to find the resources to help him get things done.

“If I feel I want to do something or create a project, I just go right for it,” he said. “They become *my* projects, not just something I do for Manana or another group. I like making a difference and working with other people. In the end, I get a lot out of it.”



## Linh Thai

## Linking Youth And Social Justice

On a rainy afternoon in Redmond, Master Linh Thai faces eager children and parents who have come to learn Vovinam – a popular form of Vietnamese martial arts. They are excited to learn the punches and kicks, but have little knowledge of the values and tradition embedded in their exercise. This is where Master Linh finds his purpose.

“In keeping with the traditions of Vietnam, this martial arts program nurtures a chivalrous character directed toward the good of others,” Linh explains. “In a big system it can seem impossible for any one individual to feel like he or she can make a difference, especially if you are a young person. I integrate personal growth with social commitment through martial arts training.” To do this, Linh translates Vovinam’s philosophy into core values that American youth can identify with – courage, commitment, compassion and community.

Linh has trained 120 students in three cities over the past five years, a majority of them from low-income housing areas. He is beginning to see the difference he can make in his chosen field of youth development. A modest and thoughtful man of Vietnamese descent, Linh claims he has much to learn about social justice. But his life speaks volumes about the impact he is already having.

For six years, Linh worked for the Department of Social and Health Services in West Seattle. Now he is earning a Master’s degree in social work from the University of Washington, runs his Vovinam martial arts school,

serves on the Vietnamese Community of Washington State that is rewriting bylaws for the Vietnamese community, and recently founded the Vietnamese Children’s Foundation to provide food and educational opportunities to orphans and disabled children in the poorest provinces of Vietnam.



Linh Thai

It was his desire to understand how the mainstream culture thinks about community and social justice that attracted him to Confluence 2002, with its focus on “Building Communities That Work For All.”

“My work is to help people from the bottom up, who are the most marginalized and need support from the mainstream community,” he said. “If my degree and work makes me friends in high places and helps me understand the mainstream community better, that will help me in my work.”

At The Confluence he met other activists from non-mainstream organizations who were trying to get the attention of the dominant culture. Seeking tangible help and moral support, these individuals found The Confluence a place where they could speak freely and feel heard, many for the first time.

For example, Linh hopes to introduce a program at Child Protective Services that will offer special help to Hispanic and Asian-Pacific Islander populations that land in the system. With lawyers, social workers and judges who do not understand the different cultural norms and pressures, trying to work with parents who may not speak English, the situation can become confusing. This only

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hurts the cause of abused and neglected children.

“Sometimes it seems like I’m wielding the sword all by myself, but when I think back to The Confluence and all of the people who are answering a similar call, I realize we have more in common than not,” Linh said. “It was like having a pow-wow in a circle of friends with common interests. Usually at a conference there is someone who throws a monkey wrench into what you’re trying to do. That didn’t happen at The Confluence. We made an intentional choice to be assets to each others’ projects, not liabilities. There was great synergy in that.”

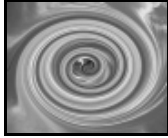
The Confluence helped Linh expand his framework for understanding community and social justice. He came away convinced he need to broaden his personal network, reaching out both to “right wing fundamentalists

and tree-huggers.” As one of the few males and sole Republican in the social work program at the University of Washington, he enjoys challenging his own and his colleagues’ notions of providing social services.

“Social justice can be on a conservative agenda, and fighting for it requires knowledge of all the counter forces you will run into,” Linh said. “The Confluence taught me how to learn from and work with those who think differently from me. It’s easier to talk about differences when you start as friends or recognize that you have a common goal.”

The connections Linh made at The Confluence helped him rejuvenate his ideals and put some of his ideas into action. “Even if I don’t call them for months, I know several people who will give me a set of ears and advice and shoulders to cry on if I need it.”

Sometimes it seems like I’m wielding the sword all by myself, but when I think back to The Confluence and all of the people who are answering a similar call, I realize we have more in common than not.



## Yvonne Sanchez

## Reaching Out To Neighbors

**F**or a woman in charge of an \$8.5 million budget and over 100 neighborhoods across the city of Seattle, Yvonne Sanchez is remarkably serene. She greets staff and visitors to the Department of Neighborhoods as if she has all day to listen to their concerns and questions. Yvonne doesn't claim to have a management secret; she relies on old-fashioned integrity.

New to her position as head of the DON in 2002, Yvonne was already aware of the good work of The Confluence through her involvement with the HOPE committee, a group that formed out of Confluence 2000 to end cycles of poverty. Confluence 2002 came at the right time to meet her new constituents and learn what was on their minds.

"I had heard there were very, very good people interested in issues around the city who attended The Confluence," she said from her office in the Arctic Building downtown. "I thought it would be helpful to participate, and it ended up having a lot of impact on me."

The Confluence has stayed with Yvonne at many different levels. Foremost on her mind is gaining a renewed sense of personal leadership and integrity.

"The leaders of The Confluence and Center for Ethical Leadership demonstrated how approaching work and life with integrity truly leads to social justice," she said. "The reinforcement of approaching issues with integrity and strength was affirming. I returned to work with a clearer ethical sense and renewed permission to speak up when I believe in something."

From her previous work as a school teacher, in the private and nonprofit sectors,

and in the city's Human Services department, Yvonne understood the importance of honoring diversity and enabling all voices to be heard. Bringing people together is one of the most important roles she has at the Department of Neighborhoods, and again, her sense of how to do it well was reinforced at The Confluence.



Yvonne Sanchez

She met Lois, a developmentally disabled woman, and Tita, a health worker from Ethiopia who led the group in laughter exercises. "I was charmed by the full extent of diversity in the room and the effort made to bring people together in a different light," Yvonne said. "It was instructional to know that we could laugh and not let the difficulties get us down."

She even encountered individuals who had opposed her appointment, not because they didn't like her, but because they loved her predecessor.

"The Confluence helped create bridges during a confrontational and difficult time," she said. "These folks got to see me separate from the job, and I got to form connections with many people that I would later come in contact with."

Yvonne left The Confluence with the goal of working with several groups on issues of social justice and race relations within her department, and in the departments' relationships with neighborhoods. Discussions at The Confluence gave her "food for thought," and helped her analyze department systems

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that might make it difficult for all voices to be heard in the city.

Her reflections at The Confluence helped spawn a new category for the Neighborhood Matching Fund program: Race Relations and Social Justice. This new category has been effective at drawing proposals from residents and communities of color who had not previously taken advantage of the neighborhood investment program.

“Everyone at The Confluence freely expressed their thoughts and feelings,” Yvonne said. “It gave me a chance to listen to community members and set the stage for

tackling the big, hard issues back at work. The calmness and renewal alone made it worth my time.”

Everyone at The Confluence freely expressed their thoughts and feelings. It gave me a chance to listen to community members and set the stage for tackling the big, hard issues back at work. The calmness and renewal alone made it worth my time.

As Yvonne leads the Department of Neighborhoods into a new year, she is grounded in values of integrity and social justice. She leads from the knowledge that integrity will help her meet the department’s mission of enhancing Seattle’s neighborhoods, empowering people to make positive contributions, and bringing government closer to all people.



Rebecca Sandel has been a sheep farmer, a provider of social service and a student of alternative economics. She knows the importance of seasonal cycles; she has witnessed hard-working people get left behind due to lack of access and resources; and she discovered the impact of systems thinking and large-scale change. Now her job is to pull these experiences together and make them useful.



Rebecca Sandel

“I want to build The Commons,” she says, with an urgency that displays evident passion. “My life work has been about community development and now I am ready to bring all I have learned to make real community possible and sustainable – a community that enables all of its citizens to grow to their full potential and contribute in meaningful ways.”

Confluence 2002, with its focus of “Building Communities That Work for All,” came at a perfect junction in Rebecca’s journey. She was leaving Lopez Island and earning a Master’s degree in Seattle, but didn’t know many people. An outgoing, energetic woman who likes to take risks, Rebecca heard about the event and knew she needed to be there.

“I figured it would be a juicy few days where I could make connections with people and have conversations about what I’m passionate about,” she said. “It was so fun I can’t believe I slept at all. It exceeded my expectations and I made some profound connections that continue to fuel my work and imagination today.”

Rebecca found Victor Bremson and his BALLE group (Business Alliance for Local Living Economies). She found Sharon Parks from the Whidbey Institute who was creating a “leadership for the Commons” project. She befriended Rich Lang who later encouraged his congregation at Ballard First Methodist Church to donate \$20,000 worth of computers for the Phinney Neighborhood Center where Rebecca worked. These alliances helped her finish her Master’s degree, create more services for families in need, and led to a teaching role at workshops on economics and the common good.

Rebecca hungrily took notes on The Confluence design and tools used for bringing diverse people together, knowing she could use these in her own work. She was particularly drawn to Gracious Space, a skill and approach taught by the Center for Ethical Leadership to explore differences and foster learning.

“Gracious Space is so invitational,” she said. “When groups come together to talk about difficult things, an adversarial spirit can easily walk in the door. Gracious Space keeps the door open to another spirit of curiosity and patience with different ideas. I’ve pulled Gracious Space into lots of meetings and gatherings I’ve led since then, and it’s made a huge difference.”

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Another lesson from The Confluence on bridging and bonding proved beneficial with her blended family. Bridging describes the activity of reaching out to people who are different; bonding describes the comfort of being with like-minded individuals. Soon after she and her partner moved to a racially diverse neighborhood, she realized that her stepchildren were overwhelmed at being different.

“We wanted to expose the kids to a multicultural neighborhood and they do see the value,” she said. “But my son was the only Caucasian child in his class and started to withdraw from the stress of constantly bridging. I was shocked I hadn’t noticed it before. Both kids needed opportunities to bond and feel comfortable in their new environment. I shared this with my 14-year-old daughter and she really got it. So we’ve made a few changes. This concept I learned at The Confluence has really supported our family life.”

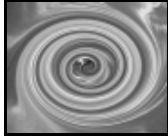
In addition to providing a fertile medium for people to make connections, Rebecca sees The Confluence as an incubator of ideas that otherwise might fade from lack of attention. Prone to occasional insomnia, Rebecca sometimes wakes at two in the morning with her mind churning on new possibilities. But she is too busy during the day to do much about them.

“The Confluence provides a set-aside time for people and ideas that is really precious,” she said. “Rarely do any of us have an extended period of time to relax and deepen into the conversation, so what is sub-textual can come to the surface. Random musings like ‘Wouldn’t it be great if...this article made me think of...here is a possible connection....’ just vanish if we don’t give them time.

“Fertilized by a beautiful setting, just enough structure and an interesting, diverse group of people, you can complete these musings into a powerful idea,” she continued. “And when you say an idea aloud it starts to live.

“I’ve had visions of building a community that is grounded in a land trust, with social services and alternative economics. Without The Confluence these would just be stray thoughts at two a.m. Now they have come together as my life mission. That’s the stuff that arises when you really connect with other people.”





## Tita Begashaw

## Spreading Joy In Times of Difficulty

If you ask Tita Begashaw to name her core values, she will very quickly offer *love* and *forgiveness*. But the truth is, when it comes to Tita, you don't really need to ask – she radiates love and forgiveness the way a candle gives off light and heat.

As she sits in a seemingly quiet corner of Harborview Medical Center – where she staffs the main reception desk – it appears that *everybody* knows Tita. She is alive with smiles, saying hello and waving to nearly everyone who passes by. She is drawn several times into brief conversations – more than once with patients with whom she's clearly made a connection. As she listens calmly to their stories of pain and discomfort, Tita gives off the kind of strength and gentleness you associate with her role model, Mother Teresa – the kind that comes from a being so radiant she makes everyone around her seem half-lighted.

Tita's route to this moment was long and circuitous. An Ethiopian immigrant, Tita first settled in Los Angeles in 1988. After several years in California and a brief stop on the east coast, Tita moved to Seattle in 1994.



Tita Begashaw

“Many immigrants become lonely and depressed,” she said, “and I wanted to help.” Organizing through her church, Tita began to assemble networks of support for newly arriving Ethiopian immigrants to help them meet new people and find homes and jobs. She went on to serve on the East African advisory committee to the Seattle Police Department.

Through her networking, Tita learned about The Confluence program and was intrigued. But first she attend a half-day Center workshop to see if she resonated with the Center's approach to values-based leadership. Her experience in that first workshop, where she encountered the concept of core values for the first time, encouraged her to attend a second workshop, and then a third.

“Tools and information have made me more strong,” she says. “My core values taught me I can't do everything, but I can have a focus.” For Tita, that focus is love and forgiveness.

“I've become more interested in love since I came to the U.S.,” Tita said. The journey of an immigrant is difficult, and she learned that love and forgiveness help her stay strong. Laughter helps, too. In July 2002, Tita took a workshop on how laughter can bring relief from stress and fear in the workplace and community. Laughter has become part of her spiritual practice. “When you laugh, there's not enough time or energy to blame or judge,” she said.

She decided to attend Confluence 2002, with its focus on “Building Communities That Work for All.” The theme resonated with her work on behalf of new immigrants, and she felt

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she could learn something from the other participants. Tita learned about ethics and about speaking the truth. She learned about working together with others who seem different from her, but who shared a common dream for a more healthy community.

The tools she learned gave her energy and power, and helped her provide strength and support for her family, community, and workplace. “These tools show how to live life,” she said. “Coming together for the common good is very powerful.”

Through her experience with The Confluence, Tita learned about community organizing and met others who are passionate about truth-telling, love and forgiveness in community building. But for all she learned, Tita left more behind in the minds and hearts of fellow participants.

When organizers learned she was a “laughter facilitator,” they invited her to host a spontaneous session. The giggles, screeches and guffaws that Tita elicited from the group left the participants bent over, helpless and out of breath. In 10 minutes of laughter, Tita helped to bond 60 individuals into a joyous community. It is one of the favorite memories participants share when they recall the three-day event.

After The Confluence, several participants invited her to their workplaces to share her mirthful magic with their colleagues. Tita attended a conference hosted by Total Living Concept, which supports developmentally disabled individuals and their families. She also attended a service project during the Academy of Management local conference, and brought her laughter exercise to a group of service providers.

Tita welcomes these opportunities to further the relationships she made at The Confluence, and follow-up with action of her own.

“Leadership is not words,” she said. “It is action.”

Inspired by Mother Theresa, Tita now makes different choices about how she approaches her life. “Every day I ask myself ‘What am I going to do today?’” As she flips open her appointment calendar, every day is marked with a word – joy, peace, courage, or forgiveness. This is how Tita chooses to live her life. “As human beings, we have to come together,” she says. “We have to give all we can to the less fortunate. There can be no separation.”

“Every day,” says Tita, “I get up. I listen to the birds. I look at the sky. This makes me so happy. As a human being, I want everyone to understand this gift. We live a very short time, but in this short time we can do so much together.”