

# Tom Little's **BIG IDEAS**

for Non-Profits

## In This Edition

November 30 – December 4, 2020

### **Outputs... Outcomes... What's the Diff?**

*When planning, you may want to look beyond your services to their impact!*

### **Emails... We get Emails**

*Tom says thanks to all those who have recommended the work his colleague Nancy Collins and he do, then acknowledges non-profit leaders who are retiring during COVID-19, without the accolades they deserve*

### **Fraud by Programmers**

*Last week it was finance directors, this week it's programmers who have found a way to commit fraud*

### **It's an Ill Wind**

*For non-profits,, events and alcohol can sometimes be a lethal combination. Forewarned is forearmed!*

*At CMCS, COVID means we Zoom more and travel less. Our work, including strategic planning, Board training and executive recruitment goes on. All continues to be possible.*

# Outputs...Outcomes...What's the Diff?

## The Story

When I was the Executive Director of a non-profit that assisted people with intellectual disabilities, my goal for the organization was providing as many quality services to as many people as possible.

That goal was based on a simple rationale. If people needed something, like a good place to live, and we provided it, we were doing the right thing. What was implicit in that way of thinking, was that a nice place to live also meant a better life for the people involved.

Had I been smarter (Spoiler alert: I am now smarter, by a lot, in case you are wondering about the merits of this article), I might have looked beyond that nice place to live, which we can characterize as the desired **output** of organizational action, to whether having that nice place to live did, in fact, result in a better life. In other words, in providing the **output**, did we achieve the desired **outcome**?

## The Skinny

Let me demonstrate the difference using one of our clients, Elmira District Community Living (EDCL) and its housing corporation, Elmira Developmental Support Corporation (EDSC).

EDSC has constructed a number of places to live for the people with intellectual disabilities it supports, including a four-building apartment complex comprising twenty-eight units, called McGuire Lane. The four buildings of McGuire Lane were intended to provide people supported by EDCL with a nice place to live. But it wasn't exclusively for them. At McGuire, they were joined by other tenants wanting affordable housing. In return, those other tenants agreed to be "good neighbours".

Using the analytical framework set out above, having a nice place to live is the output, and EDCL/EDSC achieved that. A job well done! But there is an additional element to McGuire Lane: beyond good housing, it offers many benefits for all its tenants, regardless of who they are. Packaged together, they produce better lives. These are its outcomes.

McGuire Lane tenants with intellectual disabilities will tell you things like:

- *I love to live independently, love exploring the town and taking the bus, which gives me new independence as well.*
- *It fulfilled my dream of being able to live in my own apartment.*
- *I like that there are opportunities for other people to get to know me and see that I'm a good person and good to hang around with.*
- *(Everyone) made me feel welcome; I like that the intention is to build relationships with people; It gives me a sense of security and belonging.*

Parents and family members benefit too:

- *If we could've come up with our own idea for what we would want for our daughter, this would be it. She can live her life the way she wants, but within a community that is safe.*
- *The realization of her dreams related to living independently, right down to things like ownership and control over own appliances...in a way that as a family we could never accomplish; a joy to see; such a load off siblings as well as parents; their dreams have come true and they have a security blanket around them.*
- *(There is) Infectious building of acquaintances and friendships in the broader community through the social network we have built with each other.*
- *There is respect for each other, respect for boundaries.*

Last, but not least are the other tenants, the good neighbours, who also describe how they gain from this living arrangement:

- *(This) is a community where people trust each other. (It) exceeded our expectations that we were trusted by our neighbours...(This) is a safe community where we know our son could knock on a neighbour's door if he needed help and he would get it without a problem. (Everyone here is) welcoming to all people, including new Canadians...This is our home now.*
- *The lines become blurred over time, we've all become good neighbours to each other.*
- *Everyone living there is working to develop that sense of community, it's not the exclusive domain of the good neighbours; reciprocity is a key element.*
- *(There is) a sense of belonging that evolves and develops over time.*
- *(I) value the relationships I have established and the sense of safety I feel.*

So the output is good housing, but the outcome, via the “good neighbour” construx, is a better life. And not just for the tenants but beyond them, the families as well.

## The BIG Idea

My BIG Idea for this week is simple. When planning, remember: Outputs are the means. Outcomes are the ends. Don't assume that good outputs will produce good outcomes. Outcomes are a separate issue that also need to be addressed.

## Emails... We Get Emails

### Appreciation for the Recommendations

In last week's BIG Ideas newsletter, I made reference to recommendations from two of our Literacy Network clients, one in Durham Region and one in northwestern Ontario, that led to other planning assignments.



Here is another example of how these things can work,. Years ago, about 2006, we started working with a small church outreach program called FOOTPRINTS, located in Pickering. FOOTPRINTS offered a respite program for children on the autism spectrum and their families, and our assistance continued until recently. One of the FOOTPRINTS' Board members belonged to the Science Teachers' Association of Ontario and recommended us to STAO to assist in planning for the future, which we then undertook. After that had finished, another STAO member who was a volunteer member of the Chatham-Kent Family Health Team, recommended us to assist CKFHT with strategic planning. That resulted in assignments with CKFHT. So the connections can be varied and fascinating.

What I didn't include in last week's article, which I should have, is how much my colleague, Nancy Collins, and I, appreciate those recommendations and many others you our BIG Ideas readers have been good enough to give us over the years. We do our best to acknowledge them via email or phone, but if you have been among those who have put in a good word on our behalf, we are now saying a big "THANK YOU".

## **Going Gently Into That Good Night**

A by-product of COVID-19 has been our inability to celebrate the retirements of people who have dedicated their work lives to Ontario's non-profit organizations.

Here I will acknowledge one, Don Wilkinson of Community Living York South, as the surrogate for all those who would have been feted under any other circumstances for their contributions to the people of Ontario, but who are slipping silently out of the spotlight.

Don and I worked together at Community Living York South when I was its executive director and he headed residential services. I have written before about how much he helped me. It would have been easy for him to let me sink or swim on my own, but that wasn't how he operated. In time he assumed the ED position and built a great organization. CLYS has never unionized because the people who work there are second in importance only to the people the organization supports. At CLYS, employees use the "we" word when they talk about it. Everyone feels that they own a part.

CLYS is also hugely diverse both in terms of who it supports and who works there, reflecting Don's commitment to all the communities that range over the southern boundary of York Region.

Finally, Don's style of management was of the "walking around" variety and he went out of his way to continuously attend meetings across the organization so employees knew who he was and how much he appreciated their contribution.

So, this is an acknowledgement of Don's contribution, and by extension many others who have concluded their work lives with little fanfare over the last months. A job well done!

Now go, get out of here, you new retirees - enjoy!

## This Week's TomBit

### Fraud By Computer Programmers

Also last week, your BIG Ideas newsletter included information about non-profit fraud, suggesting the perps were usually the heads of finance departments.

But a recent series of articles in the Toronto Star newspaper suggests that fraud can be resident in other parts of the organization too. The case it profiles involves a senior IT executive in the Ontario government, who is alleged to have diddled its software to allow millions of dollars in pandemic funding for families of children to be directed into bank accounts held in his name and that of his family members. This is a variation on the fake employee trick we talked about last week, with IT in the spotlight instead of finance.

As if non-profit CEO/Executive Directors didn't have enough to worry about, now they need to extend their "professional scepticism" to their IT departments as well. Yuk!



## Blast from the Past

*Blast from the Past is a selection of previous BIG Ideas articles that you may not have read, or if you did, may have forgotten how helpful and insightful (i.e. brilliantly written) they were. This article is from 2018.*

### It's an Ill Wind

#### The Story

Let's assume for a moment that you not only help form a non-profit to organize a festival that promotes local wineries, but you also agree to sit on the volunteer Board of Directors. Net proceeds will help fund other non-profits in the area. It's a double do-good project and you like that.

Would you be concerned about liability since alcohol would be consumed? Of course you would.

To address the issue, what if you did the following:

- Hired a security firm to check identification;
- Had police officers on hand;
- Ensured all servers were Smart Serve trained;



- Located security staff in the wine booths;
- Circulated flyers to volunteers that promoted zero tolerance for serving alcohol to minors;
- Walked the festival while it was underway to ensure everything was going to plan?

As a Board member, would you feel you and your colleagues had exercised your due diligence?

If you did you would probably be right, at least 99.9% of the time. But there is always the exception, which is proven by the case of a southwestern Ontario wine festival. It did all the above, yet still ended up in tragedy and legal problems.

## **The Skinny**

According to media reports, the festival's undoing was not a wine booth, which you might expect, but a food booth, which you probably wouldn't expect. The people involved with the food booth brought wine to reward the volunteers working in it. One volunteer was a teenager, just days shy of the legal drinking age of nineteen.

Subsequent legal testimony indicates she was not asked for proof of age and did not attend a volunteers' meeting where the zero-tolerance rule related to underage drinking was discussed. Moreover, it indicates she drank wine in the booth.

While illegal, this would still not have been a problem, unless something bad happened to this young woman, which it did. On the way home after the festival closed for the night, she was involved in a single car accident and died of her injuries.

Charges were laid, a court case ensued, and the festival was found guilty under the Liquor Licence Act of failing to inspect a piece of identification of a person apparently under the age of 19 and allowing a person under the age of 19 to drink alcohol. The Justice of the Peace hearing the case fined the Festival \$66,000, having concluded that although the Festival did a lot to prevent underage drinking, it should have anticipated there might be alcohol in food booths and taken action accordingly.

Originally, charges under the Liquor Licence Act were also laid against individual Festival directors and the company sponsoring the booth and its principals. Those were dropped as the case moved forward. In the end, only the corporate entity that was the Festival was deemed to be responsible, which might be a small bit of good news for other non-profits if the case ends up setting a precedent.

This isn't the end of the story either. The young woman's family is reported to have filed a \$3.6 million civil suit against the Festival, the company that sponsored the booth and two of the company's principals.

## **The BIG Idea**

A young woman is dead. A family is devastated. Volunteer Board members, thinking they were doing the right thing for the community, ended up paying a huge price for their efforts. The Festival, a growing success to that point, is no longer. And with its demise goes promoting local business and funding other non-profits.

My BIG Idea for this week, informed perfectly by 100% hindsight, is to be ever vigilant. Look for bogeymen everywhere. Take nothing for granted. And be prepared for the fallout if your due diligence, which you feel has been more than sufficient, proves to be in vain.

Oh, and watch the weather for possible omens! On the evening before the events described above unfolded, a windstorm swept through the Festival, forcing it to close early. Some might say the storm was a harbinger of things to come.

## 2020 Update

The festival had been an important attraction for the wine-making region of southwestern Ontario, and in 2019 it was replaced by the Urban Wine Festival, sponsored by WindsorEats, four years after the closure of its predecessor.

## Current CMCS Clients

We are pleased to be working with York Region Centre for Community Safety, Community Living Thunder Bay, Canopy Support Services (formerly Tri-County Community Support Services), Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Community Visions and Networking (Quinte), Chatham-Kent Family Health Team and Community Living St. Catharines. Recent clientele includes Literacy Network Northeast, Durham Youth Services, Community Living Trent Highlands and Mill Creek Care Centre.

## Testimonials

*On behalf the Board of Directors, we would like to thank you very much for facilitating the work of creating a new strategic plan for our network. It was a pleasure to work with you and everything flowed smoothly. It is great to have this project complete! I hope we will get the opportunity to work together again in the future.*

**Rita Delaurier, Executive Director, Literacy Network Northeast**

*Thank you so much (for your Board training)! Looking forward to the notes and your presentation was very well received! Lots of growth happening with the board and you helped steer more of that in the right direction. Really enjoy working with you and will keep you in mind for my other boards.*

**Natasha Cosulich Vemb, Board of Directors, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Clarington**

*Thank you again to you and Nancy for all the work, dedication and effort put into this Operations Review. We made the right choice in hiring you to do this project and on behalf of the board of directors, I express our deep gratitude.*

**Roz Werner-Arce, Board Chair, Durham Youth Services**

*Our Strategic Plan is moving along better than I could have imagined. I chair the group of around 20 Board and staff who have been meeting monthly for the past 6 months and plan to continue through the fall. Great enthusiasm from all involved and much is being accomplished already, particularly on renewed focus on our Mission and Vision. Thanks again for getting us off on the right foot!*

**Frank Moore, Board Chair, Community Living Central Huron**

## About Tom Little and Nancy Collins

Tom Little and Nancy Collins are the principals of CMCS.



In addition to consulting for many years, Tom has been Executive Director of a large human service organization, experience he brings to the table when working with his non-profit clients. In his younger days he was lucky enough to be part of three Canadian champion hockey teams while attending the University of Toronto.

Nancy's background includes a degree from Wilfrid Laurier and working at a downtown Toronto law firm. In her spare time, at least when there is no pandemic, she plays goal in women's hockey and catcher in summer slo-pitch. A life-long Leafs fan, she no longer apologizes for her unwavering commitment, given their resurrection in recent years. Now if they could just win a playoff round!





## Free Resources From CMCS

We offer a range of free resources to help non-profits be better. For your copy, contact us at [info@cmcsconsulting.ca](mailto:info@cmcsconsulting.ca)

Board Duties  
Policy Board Model  
Board Meeting Minutes  
Board Decision-Making Checklist  
Board Evaluation Form  
Dealing with Risk  
List of Possible Board Policies  
Board Recruitment (Stop the BIG LIE)  
Management Principles  
Member and Director Qualifications  
The Importance of Planning  
Canada's Great Non-Profit Websites  
Transitioning to the New Not-for-Profit Corporations Act

## Tom's Book For Boards of Directors



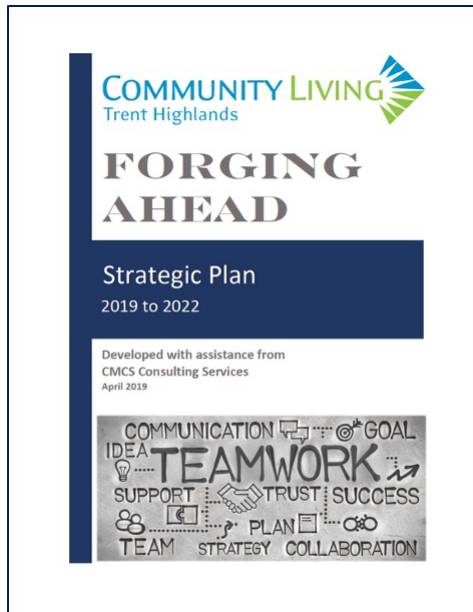
One hundred and ninety-pages. Thirty-six *BIG Ideas*. Thirteen of them are *The BIGGEST of the BIG*, ideas Tom's experience says are critical to any non-profit. Then come twenty-three *BIG Ideas*, more ways to enhance the governance of your organization.

You don't just get ideas either. The book contains all kinds of resources for implementing them. For example, *BIG Ideas* includes samples of strategic and Board yearly action plans, and of evaluation formats Boards can use to rate their own work.

*Tom Little's BIG Ideas* is formatted as a work book, so it can be used on a continuous basis by the Directors. It is easy to read and has a fun quality your Board members will appreciate.

Just \$40 plus HST and shipping. For your copy, contact us at [info@cmcsconsulting.ca](mailto:info@cmcsconsulting.ca).

## More About CMCS



At CMCS, our specialty is strategic planning. Since the start of 2018, the following 14 organizations have completed their strategic plans with help from CMCS:

Kenora Association for Community Living  
Community Living Dryden-Sioux Lookout  
Community Living Trent Highlands  
Elmira District Community Living  
Literacy Northwest  
Durham Region Child Care Forum  
Tollendale Village  
Centennial College School of Transportation  
York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee  
Autism Home Base Durham  
Canoe FM Community Radio  
Toronto Island Residential Community Trust  
York Region Centre for Community Safety  
Literacy Network Northeast

We provide Board training that comes with a bonus: A Board action plan developed by participants based on the discussion.

Tom wrote his book for non-profit Boards, which you can buy and use as an ongoing resource. We are great facilitators and can help develop agendas for Board and management retreats.

Much of our past work has been in the human service sector, especially disability. But we have assisted in other sectors such as community colleges, local workforce authorities, family health teams, Big Brothers Big Sisters, United Ways and violence against women. We have even assisted a community radio station.

We have built our reputation on producing quality products that have great content and are appealing to look at.