CultureCase

# Poetry as a positive community development tool



This research was conducted by **Sandra D. Sjollema and Jill Hanley** at **McGill University, Canada.**

## Summary

This paper sought to investigate the impact of poetry for community development. The study found that poetry groups are used as a tool for community development in community settings, generating numerous benefits for both disadvantaged populations as well as participants from other demographics, including educated and middle class populations. In particular, participants developed a greater sense of agency and social capital.

## The results are based on interviews with twelve people from Montreal, Canada who participated in community-based creative writing groups in 2011

The data came from poetry group participants, group facilitators and organization directors and volunteers. It involved five community-based creative writing groups based in food banks and drop-in centres. Four key categories of community development were explored in the study: capacity building (engaging the skills and capacities of participants); community building (an increase in identifying with a community); social capital (social networks of support); agency (ability to intervene in the world).

## Poetry has much in common with other forms of art as a tool for community development

It was found that the act of creating, writing and sharing poetry with other members of the groups was seen as an act of empowerment, and therefore

agency was one of the main benefits of these groups. Other benefits were experienced by participants, including an increased sense of self-esteem, increased leadership or group participation skills, and increased sense of community and proactive desire to participate in other community activities. Another suggested benefit was increased literary knowledge and communication skills, and for the facilitators an increased insight into poverty and mental health issues.

This summary is written by **Charlotte Fereday, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

## Keywords

**interview** **development** **Canada** **community** **poetry**

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| Author email | **sandra.dennisonsjollema@mail.mcgill.ca** |

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