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As Communities Face Crossroads, a Winnipeg Citizen Journalism Project Offers Hope

Image

Community News Commons a path to creating more compassionate responses to our complex world: Noah Erenberg

The broader community is at a crossroads of change; change in how we communicate, how we tell stories, how we gather, and most of all, how we include everyone in our community in this effort. So what's a promising response to this crossroads?

In Winnipeg, a four-year-old citizen journalism effort offers a ray of hope.

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Maze skaters on the Red River in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo credit: Winnipeg citizen Greg Petzold. This photo garnered a huge response online after it was was posted to the citizen journalism project of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Community News Commons. The quality of this photo lies in what it reveals about community, says Noah Erenberg, Community News Commons convener.

Spearheaded by The Winnipeg Foundation, Community News Commons trains, engages and empowers citizens to share the stories that are shaping their neighbourhoods.

“At this fork in the road, the challenge is to choose a path that best provides an opportunity for members of our community to share meaningful thoughts and ideas that will create positive impact on citizens and on the environments in which they live,” says Noah Erenberg, Community News Commons convener.

“As well, the goal is to work towards building a community that flourishes – for everyone. Our greatest task will be to include all members of our community in this effort, in particular, First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and to reconcile our relationships with First Peoples that, to this point, have not been very positive.

“The work I am doing is a promising response in that it provides a means for all members of our community to participate and be heard, as well as providing an opportunity for more compassionate responses to our complex world.”

In addition to offering a way and space for citizens to create stories around what matters most to them, the Community News Commons project gives them a chance to improve their digital media skills while gaining valuable experience in the field of

communications.

Citizens receive training and mentorship free of charge thanks to ongoing support from The Winnipeg Foundation and sponsorships from a partnership of organizations, including the Winnipeg Free Press and Red River College.

Noah works with the citizen journalists to produce the multimedia stories, which vary widely in topic. Just this past couple of weeks, Community News Commons headlines ranged from the finer art of making tea to the costs of driverless cars.

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>
> — *Noah Erenberg*

All of this fits with a broader focus on identifying what matters to people and sharing that with the broader community.

“I think we all have a passion to tell our own stories. It’s what we do as humans. Life is certainly a narrative experience and we impart pieces of that narrative to each other on a daily basis; nowadays it would be more like a moment-by-moment basis,” Noah wrote in an introductory blog to Community News Commons. “I couldn’t think of a better way to continue pursuing my life long goal of helping give a voice to people wanting to tell their stories.”

Noah is currently most energized by the growth of the Community News Commons project and its impact on the community, particularly by the increased participation of citizens who want to create multimedia stories, the heightened depth and breadth of the stories being published, and the expanded community engagement the project has provided.

“Because of the nature of how we gather and disseminate information in 2016, it is now possible to attract a much larger audience than ever before, simply by telling a compelling story that motivates people to care and create positive change in the world,” he says. “This was not as possible five years ago, and was nearly impossible 10 or 15 years ago.”

One example is this story here: Winnipeg Transit driver’s amazing act of kindness stuns passengers by Denise Campbell.

“This was reported just two months after we started Community News Commons; our fledgling project had only a few thousands views online. Within 24 hours of publishing this story, we had 150,000 people reading Community News Commons,” Noah says.

Looking ahead, the next best steps would be to deepen the relationships Community News Commons has already established with collaborating partners, create further partnerships with people and organizations in the community, and provide greater opportunities for citizen engagement on many levels. “In other words, do what we’ve been doing so far, but with greater intention and effort in connecting with community,” Noah says.

Visit the Winnipeg Community News Commons website here: www.cncwpg.org

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