

September 2010

Title: *The Power of Collaborative Solutions: Six Principles and Effective Tools for Building Healthy Communities*

Author : Thomas Wolff

Reviewed by Adrienne Paine-Andrews

In “The Power of Collaborative Solutions: Six Principles and Effective Tools for Building Healthy Communities”, Tom Wolff provides a passionate and convincing case for using collaborative approaches to address our most intractable community problems. He offers personal reflection, case studies and tools based on his extensive experience to help us move toward more effective, sustainable, and collaborative solutions.

Book chapters are anchored by six key principles for collaborative solutions that surfaced through Tom’s experience over many years working with hundreds of communities and organizations to address local issues. In brief, the six key principles: First, encourage true collaboration as the form of exchange. True collaboration moves beyond networking and coordination to sharing risks, resources, rewards and responsibilities.

Second, engage the full diversity of the community especially those most directly affected. Tom offers a variety of simple strategies for engaging the community and reminds us that we can only find solutions that will meet the needs of the entire community if all groups are present and participating.

Third, practice democracy and promote active citizenship and empowerment. Tom offers strategies and tools for creating the space for conversations where all voices are heard, respected and counted and encourages a collaborative leadership approach.

Fourth, employ an ecological approach that builds on community strengths. Focus on the assets of the community, organization, and individual and recognize the interdependence of behavior and the environment.

Fifth, take action by addressing issues of social change and power on the basis of a common vision. Tom outlines several factors associated with successful coalitions including a clear vision and mission, leadership, and planning for community and systems change.

Sixth, engage spirituality as your compass for social change. Tom argues that appreciation, interdependence, acceptance and compassion should guide social change efforts.

Community psychology practitioners, undergraduate and graduate community psychology programs and community leadership programs may find the book helpful in developing and guiding practical collaborative skills and approaches. This book does not describe theory or extensive research, but could serve as a companion resource to those that do.

In summary, “The Power of Collaborative Solutions: Six Principles and Effective Tools for Building Healthy Communities” is an outstanding book and a significant contribution to community psychology practice. Collaborative solutions allow us to be bigger than ourselves, to do together what we are unable to do alone. And, Tom shows us that collaborative solutions are necessary and within our reach.