

## **Inclusive Leadership Adventures – Exploring the Earth Charter; *Building Bridges Consulting, CANADA***

### **Background**

*Inclusive Leadership Adventures* brings diverse people together to explore, share and celebrate differences. The *Inclusive Leadership Adventures* are organized around the *Building Bridges* approach. This was developed by Dr. Linda Hill, a psychologist and educator, based on more than thirty years of work with schools, community groups and other organizations. The concept for *Inclusive Leadership Adventures* began in 2000, when Linda was asked by a Canadian NGO and the Canadian government to apply the *Building Bridges* process to develop a youth oriented diversity education conference. She agreed and since has organized and run several workshops guiding youth to “explore the world of differences,” ranging from a brief hour-long workshop to full week retreats.

In the fall of 2003, Linda volunteered to become a mentor to members of the international Earth Charter Youth Initiative.



*The world is in our hands*

It was at this point that she decided to adapt the experiential curriculum to develop an experimental exploration of the Earth Charter.

### **Aim**

*Inclusive Leadership Adventure – Exploring the Earth Charter* is about building bridges across differences. The aim of the *Exploring the Earth Charter* adventure is for all participants and co-facilitators to get beyond the words of the Earth Charter and develop spiritual, emotional, and intellectual connections. The goal of the adventure is to lead participants towards practical actions for implementing the principles and values of the Earth Charter. The goal is to have participants at the end of each Adventure to leave with:

- A deeper understanding of the Earth Charter
- An appreciation of social diversity and biodiversity as gifts that enrich communities
- Inclusive leadership skills for acting in ways and guiding others to act in ways that reflect the Earth Charter's principles
- Plans to implement the principles and values of the Earth Charter at the local level

Overall, it is hoped that participants will join the Earth Charter Initiative.

### **Participants**

The direct stakeholders are the people who participated and co-facilitated. So far over 100 youth and adults have been involved, either as

participants or as co-facilitators. To ensure that participants and facilitators come from many different schools, organizations and communities, there is a rule that a maximum of four people can come from any one school or youth group. Participants and facilitators are expected to develop local action plans for bringing the Earth Charter back to their schools, youth groups and other community organizations.



*Cooperative games*

## **Timeframe**

The first Earth Charter Youth Leadership Adventure, called 'Exploring the Earth Charter', was held in November 2003. A Training the Trainers week held in spring 2004 was attended by Michael Slaby and Renaud Richard (current and former coordinators of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative). A second "Exploring the Earth Charter" adventure was held in fall 2004 and with a third adventure planned in fall 2005. This has become an annual event.



*Not just taking a nap*

## **Description**

All activities during the four day exploration of the Earth Charter were developed with and by youth from many different backgrounds and learning styles and leadership experiences. There are two fundamental aspects to the process. The first is to explore the "magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms" through direct interaction. The second fundamental aspect is to develop and practice skills for "forging inclusive solutions" through direct experience.

Participants are guided through a series of indoor and outdoor challenges and creative activities that get everyone involved in sharing leadership to create a community based on the principles of the Earth Charter. They learn to communicate and connect in ways that build bridges across differences and replace prejudice and discrimination with sensitivity, openness, and valuing all living beings. Participants learn to see each other and all living beings as potential role models for putting the principles of the Earth Charter into practice.

Throughout the inclusive exploration of the Earth Charter, the facilitators modelled inclusive leadership skill through the following six Building Bridges steps:

- 1- Networking – reaching out to and welcoming everyone.
- 2- Gathering – being a role model for the ground rules of safety, respect, choice and fun.
- 3- Relationship Building – building relationships with the Earth Charter, with each other and with nature.
- 4- Community Building – sharing leadership in exploring how the Earth Charter applies to our temporary community and the various long term communities we each represent.
- 5- Action Planning – planning what to do with the Earth Charter after the adventure is over.

- 6- Follow-up – keeping in touch and becoming a member in the global Earth Charter Youth Initiative.

## **Funding**

These adventures are sustained through shared leadership. All organizers and facilitators are volunteers. Funding for the costs of food, accommodation, materials and supplies has come from small contributions from dozens of individuals and organizations. Each participant is encouraged to pay what they can and to help out with fund raising.



*Beach semi-circle*

## **Results**

The short term results have been very positive. Analyses of evaluations completed at the end of each adventure have consistently had eighty percent positive comments and twenty percent suggestions for improvement. Some

positive comments included:

- “Exploring the Earth Charter made us realize how much our lives are connected to the Earth.”
- “Inclusive leadership and the Earth Charter go together.”
- “I deeply value the opportunity to have been able to connect with a diverse group of people interested in community leadership.”

Twenty percent of the evaluation comments made suggestions for improvements or expressed concerns. For example:

- “There is a need to clarify, simplify, and explain the Earth Charter in ways that make it less overwhelming.”
- “A few instances of strong emotions in the group made some people feel uncomfortable.”
- “I believe more time is needed on Local Action Plans, as this shows people (how to) apply what they have learned and make a difference in the world.”

## **Conclusion**

The ‘Exploring the Earth Charter’ leadership adventure is an excellent example of how the core themes of the Earth Charter can be powerfully transmitted through a process of active, experiential learning, where the format of the ‘learning’ makes it a model example of a pedagogical approach which fits the spirit of the Earth Charter.

*This case had been directly drawn from the following sources:*

- “Exploring the Earth Charter – An inclusive leadership adventure for youth and adults who care about youth” reports by Linda Hill. December 2003, May 2004, December 2004.
- “Exploring the Earth Charter: A series of experiential education adventures for guiding students through the Earth Charter” by Linda Hill. In *Green Teacher: Education for Planet Earth* Issue 75, Winter 2004-2005. pages 33-38.