

Training for Transition (T4T): Ann Arbor, Michigan; January 31 – February 1, 2009

By Jeannine LaPrad

“We're in for enormous disruption, no matter what.
The question is how we deal with it and ameliorate its worst effects.”
David Korten, author and economist

We live in a time of transition – movement into the Ecozoic Era, as Thomas Berry has called it. Signs are increasingly apparent: peak oil, climate unpredictability, and ecological and economic instability. How are we to live into such a moment with intention and hope? How can we act on our commitment to life and the common good?

Out of Kinsale, Ireland, comes extraordinary possibility. Four years ago, permaculture teacher Rob Hopkins challenged his students with this question: How might we plan for moving from oil dependence to local resilience and community self-reliance? Kinsale town leaders ultimately adopted the students' Energy Descent Plan, and since 2006, with Rob's leadership, a community-based process for any locality to create such a plan has been spreading around the world.

The Transition Initiatives approach empowers communities to face the challenges of peak oil and climate change, and to unleash the collective genius of their own people to find the answers to this momentous question: For all those aspects of life that our communities need to sustain themselves and thrive, how are we going to drastically reduce carbon emissions (in response to climate change), significantly rebuild resilience (in response to peak oil), and greatly strengthen our local economies (in response to economic and social instability)?

Over 130 officially designated Transition initiatives now exist – cities, towns, districts, villages, islands. The first in North America was designated last year in Colorado – Transition Boulder County co-founded by Michael Brownlee and Lynette Marie Hanthorn.

In Ann Arbor, Michigan on January 31 and February 1, 2009, Michael and Lynette Marie led more than 50 people through the first Training for Transition in

Michigan. Participants were from as far as Ohio, Kentucky, New Jersey and Minnesota, with the majority coming from Chelsea, Ypsilanti, Detroit and Ann Arbor. This training was an opportunity for people to come together and begin to learn about a new way of thinking, living, and working together to make our communities more resilient and more abundant.

The Training for Transition is designed to give a detailed introduction to the most important skills necessary to successfully set up, develop, and run a Transition project in any locality. It is designed for people who are already in a group working to achieve this, or are thinking of creating such a group. This training follows the transition model in paying attention to both the outer work and the inner work necessary for a successful transition process.

Saturday's focus was on the outer world context – working with information about peak oil and climate change, visioning a future world, raising awareness, and understanding stages of transition. Michael and Lynnette Marie led participants in exercises on how to share information about the “triple threat” — global warming, peak oil, and economic instability – with others in our communities. They also discussed the different stages of transition and how the principles of permaculture are an important underpinning of this movement. Finally, they shared Richard Heinberg's recommendations for organizing an emergency community response to energy, economic, and food shocks.

The psychology of change was addressed on Sunday and participants had the opportunity to experience how to engage the heart and soul in this work, not only the brain. Ultimately, at the heart of this part of the training is the understanding that the scale of this transition requires reconnecting more deeply with ourselves, each other, and nature. And, that working with the psychology of change and harnessing the power of a positive vision are both essential ingredients to the work of transition.

In addition to exploring the inner aspects of transition on Sunday, participants had an opportunity to apply what was being learned in the training to action(s) they might take to support the healthy growth of transition in their in their community. Using a particular group methodology called “Open Space,” participants were engaged in a highly self-organizing and energizing process to help each person start to make the move from ideas to action.

Michael says the Transition movement “may be the most important, most inspirational movement in the world.” Theologian and professor Timothy

Gorrindge from the U.K. said recently in New York City, “The Transition movement is the most hopeful and practical possibility” he sees; it “puts faith in ordinary people. It’s about people shaping their world through conversation and action. Things happen without the local government doing anything. It’s a profound and tremendously hopeful reinvention of democracy.”

The Transition movement makes “no claim to have all the answers,” states Michael, “but by building on the wisdom of the past and accessing the pool of ingenuity, skills, and determination in our communities, the solutions can readily emerge.” The Training for Transition is a first step in learning more about how to pull communities together to explore the practicalities of rebuilding local resilience and reducing carbon emissions.

Many thanks to the Training for Transition planners: Lisa Marshall Bashert, Kris Kaul, Jeanne Mackey, and Jeannine Palms for all they did to help bring the training to Michigan. Thanks to Blanche Price for securing the location for the training, Rudolf Steiner High School, and to others associated with the school for their generosity. Thanks also to the Ypsilanti Food Co-op for providing the outstanding catering for the training.

Finally, many thanks to Michael and Lynette Marie for facilitating the training. Their re-localization experience in Boulder and knowledge of transition work in the U.K., as well as their deep understanding of personal and social transformation, provided an energizing and hopeful learning experience.

For additional info: www.transitionann Arbor.org