

"Food is our common
ground, a universal
experience."

JAMES BEARD



Food

Food social policy in British Columbia

Despite our world-renowned public health care system and a tradition of strong social supports, B.C. lacks any real commitment to adequate food social policy.

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Canada's food system: Does it exclude our most vulnerable people?

Access to safe, sufficient, and appropriate food is essential to happy living and general health—who are we leaving out?

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Community kitchens: More than just cooking together

When people join a group cooking project, they create more than good food—they create community.

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Creating a just and sustainable food system in Vancouver

Vancouver is reaping the diverse benefits—social, environment, economic—of a new focus on food policy.

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SPARC BC's recipe for success

SPARC BC recently held its Annual General Meeting in Surrey, B.C. We were excited to be visiting the area, as it is currently home to a dynamic array of community development projects, and we wanted to celebrate their efforts. We were also excited to report on what SPARC BC has accomplished over the last year.

We hope you'll read the annual report insert in this issue of *SPARC BC News*, as it's our report to you, our members and supporters, about SPARC BC's activities and the financial strengths of the organization. We feel that we've accomplished a great deal this past year and that we are making progress on achieving our strategic objectives, and ultimately SPARC BC's mission: working with communities to build a just and healthy society for all.

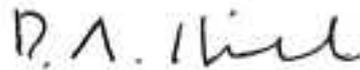
While reflecting on our successes and thinking about the food theme of this issue of *SPARC BC News*, it occurred to me to ask: What is SPARC BC's recipe for success?

I think it is staying true to our themes—like a

chef who knows her cuisine, SPARC BC recognizes its commitment to our three priority areas: community development, income security, and accessibility. In those areas we develop our array of dishes—projects that we know others will want to taste and support. We season our work with experience, and, above all, we want to share it with others.

I'm very pleased to welcome four new members to our Board of Directors, Lynn Florey from Prince George, Jean Bennet from Sechelt, Glenda Watson Hyatt from Surrey, and Denise Taylor from Kamloops.

We look forward to working together and cooking up more great things from SPARC BC through the next year. (You can start with one of my favourite recipes below: Guinness Stout Ginger Cake!)



DANIEL HILL
PRESIDENT, SPARC BC

Guinness Stout Ginger Cake

1 cup Guinness Stout
1 cup molasses
½ tbsp baking soda
3 large eggs
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
¾ cup vegetable oil
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tbsp ground ginger
1 ½ tsp baking powder
¾ tsp ground cinnamon
¼ tsp ground cloves
¼ tsp nutmeg
⅛ tsp cardamom
1 tbsp peeled fresh ginger root

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9" x 5" loaf pan and line the bottom and sides with greased parchment paper. Alternatively, butter and flour a 6-cup Bundt pan.

In a large saucepan over high heat, combine the stout and molasses and bring to a boil. Turn off the heat and add the baking soda. Allow to sit until the foam dissipates.

Meanwhile, in a bowl whisk together eggs and both sugars; whisk in the oil.

In a separate bowl, mix the dry ingredients.

Combine the stout mixture with the egg mixture while whisking, then whisk all the liquid into the flour mixture, half at a time. Add the fresh ginger and stir to combine.

Pour the batter into the pan and bake for 1 hour or until the top springs back when gently pressed. Do not open the oven until the cake is almost done, or the centre may fall slightly. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.



OUR MISSION

The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia works with communities in building a just and healthy society for all.

ABOUT SPARC BC

SPARC BC is a non-partisan, independent charitable organization. Since 1966, SPARC BC has conducted public education and advocacy on key social issues, focusing our efforts on the areas of:

- Income Security
- Accessibility
- Community Development



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Founded in 1966, SPARC BC is a non-partisan, independent charitable organization who draws its members from across British Columbia.

SPARC BC conducts public education and advocacy on the priority issues identified by a provincial Board of Directors and volunteer committees. SPARC BC's Research and Consulting Services, Parking Permit Program for People with Disabilities, Community Development Education Program, and other programs contribute to the goals of fostering the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities in BC.

SPARC BC gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of over 14,500 members and donors, and the United Way of the Lower Mainland. Membership in SPARC BC is open to all persons who support the mission and goals of the organization.

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SPARC BC's Web Facelift

SPARC BC launched its new website in June. The site possesses an updated design, an array of accessibility and usability features, a categorized and searchable

publications database, and a variety of new web communications tools for the networks that we support. Come visit us today at: www.sparc.bc.ca





Despite our world-renowned public health care system and a tradition of strong social supports, Canada and its provinces show a distressing lack of commitment to adequate food social policy. **BY CATHLEEN KNEEN**

Food social policy in British Columbia

THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT are so obvious that one feels a little foolish stating them. For instance: food is the basis of health and appropriate food is a prerequisite for general population health and resistance to disease.

Unfortunately, social policy in Canada, while providing publicly funded health care, has left food to the vagaries of the marketplace. The results are painful. Many people simply cannot afford to acquire adequate and appropriate food. The annual report from the Dietitians of Canada, *The Cost of Eating in BC*, shows that a family on social assistance or on minimum wage cannot afford both housing and food. The problems are not limited to quantity and access, however. The food business in North America has aggressively marketed high-profit foods of questionable nutritional value—items like soda pop and snack foods, which are loaded with sugar, salt, and fat (and artificial, possibly carcinogenic sugar sub-

stitutes, hydrogenated ‘trans’ fats, and a pharmacopoeia of chemical compounds designed to enhance ‘mouth-feel’ and shelf life). Along with fast foods—fries, burgers, and shakes—these types of food are marketed to children in particular, and the current ‘epidemic’ of childhood obesity is a logical outcome.

“Social policy in Canada, while providing publicly funded health care, has left food to the vagaries of the marketplace. Many people simply cannot afford adequate and appropriate food.”

At the production end, a similar scenario has unfolded as synthetics and mass production have become the hallmarks ‘conventional’ agriculture, which essentially produces, not food, but agricultural commodities for a global market. The distance of this model from the lived reality of people who, as Alice Waters famously quipped,

“eat food for a living” is clear from the increasing (invisible) prevalence of genetically engineered foods and the inhumane treatment of some animals in industrial food production processes. Such horrors only cross the threshold of most

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people's attention when there is an outbreak of disease or rumours of a new carcinogen.

In a nutshell, people have lost control of their food systems. In terms of social policy, then, food policy must be aimed at regaining some measure of that control, as well as ameliorating

“Social policy in relation to food must address the entire food system, from farm to fork. It is a scandal that anyone should go hungry in a country as wealthy as ours.”

the most devastating effects of our current industrial food policy such as hunger, chronic disease, and cultural dislocation. As Dr. John Millar, Provincial Health Officer at the time, noted in his 1995 report *Health Goals for British Columbia: Identifying Priorities for a Healthy Population*, a sense of control over one's own life is among the critical determinants of health.

Rod MacRae, a food policy analyst and former Executive Director of the Toronto Food Policy Council, has stated: “Food security requires the creation of coherent food policy that has optimal nourishment of the population as its highest purpose, makes agricultural production and distribution a servant of that purpose, and ensures the food system is environmentally, socially and financially sustainable.”

The BC Food Systems Network actually defines food security as a sustainable food system in which (1) everyone is able to acquire, in a dignified manner, adequate quantity and quality

of personally acceptable food; (2) people are able to earn a living wage by growing, producing, processing, handling, retailing, and serving food; (3) the quality of land, air, and water are maintained and enhanced for future generations; and (4) food is recognized as the basis of health and celebrated as central to community and cultural integrity.

In other words, social policy in relation to food must address the entire food system, from farm to fork. Obviously the inequities of access are a high priority. It is a scandal that anyone should go hungry in a country as wealthy as ours. However, the structures that create hunger must also be addressed; and given that this is a long-term project, programs must be established that will help people regain the skills and tools necessary to survive in the short to medium term. This means not only public support for such programs as community kitchens and community gardens and the elimination of junk food in schools, but also public support for the infrastructure required to re-locate food production, processing, and distribution in communities throughout the province.

For example: in the 1997 document, *A Baseline for Food Policy in British Columbia*, we noted that foreign ownership and corporate mergers have effectively removed most vegetable processing from the province. This means that in the off-season residents of the province who do not have canned or frozen their own food are

dependent upon imports. In terms of community food security, investment in local processing facilities would be a wise move. Similarly, the provincial government's changes to the Meat Inspection Regulation, which come into full effect in September 2006, will 'raise the bar' for the very small plants that now provide slaughter services in many small and remote communities to the point where they will go out of business. Public investment in upgrading such facilities would ensure that farms raising a few animals as part of a holistic agriculture will be able to continue to provide meat to the local community.

The contamination and pollution of land, air, and water from some practices of industrial agri-

culture not only cause health risks, but are obviously not sustainable in the long term. There is substantial interest in government and in the agriculture community to find more benign modes of dealing with pests, for example, than the use of potent agro-toxins. Many would like to switch to organic production but are wary of the increased costs of transition. British Columbia could copy some European jurisdictions and provide financial support for farms in transition to organic production.

What B.C. needs is an overall food security policy that is based in the recognition that any jurisdiction that cannot feed its people is at the mercy of whomever does. ■

FOOD INSECURITY:

A growing problem according to StatsCan

Canada is a country with fields of plenty—or so we like to think. Images of amber wheat fields and vast cattle ranches, fruit-laden orchards and fields of leafy green, fisheries swimming in opportunity. These, at least, are some of the images that have long been invoked with regard to Canada's farming and food production capabilities. And yet during 2001—the last year of the census—almost one in eight Canadians experienced food insecurity at some point during the year. An estimated 3.7 million people were considered to be living in what is known as a "food-insecure" household at some point during 2000/01, according to the article "Food insecurity" published by StatsCan. This alarming statistic stands in sharp contrast to the traditional images of Canadian bounty. For more information see the StatsCan Daily—May 3, 2005:

<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050503/d050503b.htm>

WHAT DOES FOOD INSECURITY MEAN FOR LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES?

Each year the BC Nutritionists publish a report that looks at the costs associated with healthy eating. The 2004 report points out that the cost of eating healthy continues to climb and that the expense of a nutritious diet is prohibitive to many low-income families. The monthly cost to feed a family of four, two parents and two children, is roughly \$630. And this means that a low-income family (making \$25,000 per year) would need to spend 30% of their income on food. If the family is on income assistance, this figure climbs to 42% of their total disposable income. The report notes: "to survive, families would be forced to seek out poor housing in unsafe neighbourhoods, line up at food banks and soup kitchens, leave their children in unsafe child care situations due to the high cost of child care, and go without the basic necessities of life, including healthy food." See the report online at:

http://www.bcasw.org/currentnewsPDF/coeibc2004_fullreport.pdf



Access to safe, sufficient, and appropriate food is essential to happy living and general population health—no one could benefit more than our vulnerable citizens. **BY KAREN RIDEOUT**

Canada's food system: Does it exclude our most vulnerable people?

THE CANADIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has long declared food to be a human right. This is a public commitment to ensuring that people have food security, consistent physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. This conception of food security includes nutritional security—not simply having *enough* food, but also having enough *safe and nutritious* food—and the acquisition of food in culturally and socially dignified ways.

While this may be the reality for the majority of Canadians, it is beyond the reach of a shocking number of people living in Canada. The 2000-01 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) found that nearly 15% of our population experienced food insecurity—they either compromised their diet or worried that they would not be able

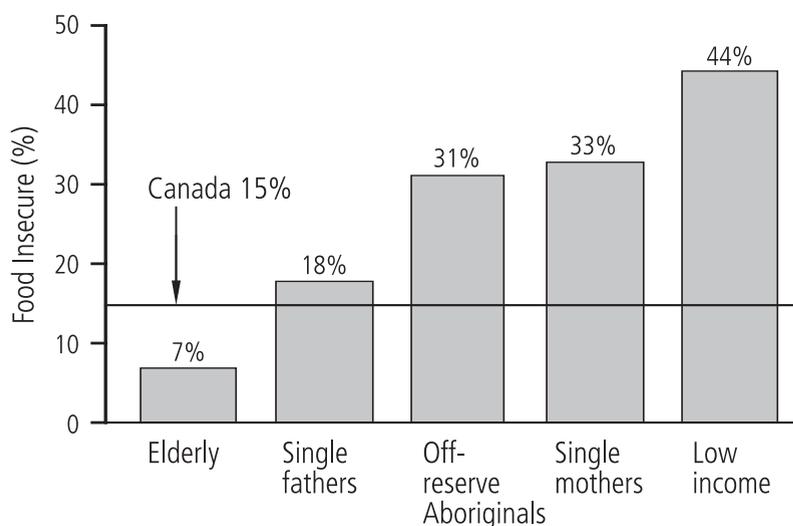
to afford enough to eat—up from just over 10% two years earlier. British Columbians fared even worse at 17%.

The CCHS and other national measures such as the National Population Health Survey have consistently found that certain vulnerable groups—people living on low incomes, social assistance recipients, the elderly, single mothers, children of lone parents, and Aboriginal people—face a much higher risk of food insecurity than the general population. People with multiple risk factors, such as Aboriginal single mothers, are even more vulnerable.

In a prosperous country like Canada, income is a major determinant of food security. The lower one's income, the more difficult it becomes to purchase adequate food. But poverty is not the only issue. Education, social supports, healthy food prices, housing and transportation

“A key contributor to poverty and food insecurity is the growing inadequacy of social assistance rates, which have not kept up with the rising costs of living and do not provide sufficient allowances for the purchase of an adequate diet.”

Vulnerability to Food Insecurity in Canada



Source: Ledrou & Gervais 2005. *Health Reports* 16(3):47–51.

issues, childcare, underemployment, cultural norms, marketing, time constraints, and faltering public services can all increase vulnerability to food insecurity.

A key contributor to poverty and food insecurity is the growing inadequacy of social assistance rates. Indeed, a recent survey by the Canadian Association of Food Banks revealed that about 60% of food bank users relied on social or employment assistance. Despite Canada's positive economic performance in recent years, social assistance rates have not kept up with the rising costs of living and do not provide sufficient allowances for the purchase of an adequate diet. At the same time, part-time or low-paid employment, particularly for women, is becoming more common.

It is widely understood that elements of the

social environment are important determinants of health. The same is true for food security. Low levels of education or literacy not only put people at higher risk for poverty due to employment difficulties, but also add to the challenge of stretching a budget, planning meals, or deciphering complex nutrition recommendations. If people are working long hours to compensate for low-wage employment, preparing healthy low-cost meals from scratch or “shopping around” for bargains can be next to impossible. This becomes even more difficult when adults have children for which to care. The high costs of hous-

ing, childcare, and transportation add stress to restricted incomes. When expenses compete in this way, food budgets tend to suffer, as they are the most fluid—it is much easier to scrimp on groceries than to pay only part of the rent.

People who are vulnerable to food insecurity tend to have increased social and economic pressures. Without the support of a partner, single parents often have increased childcare costs and may be discouraged from accepting employment. Food shopping becomes more difficult with small children along, particularly when they are influenced by child-focused marketing messages. With children present, the decision to purchase low-cost healthy foods rather than more trendy (and expensive) products such as sugary cereals or prepared lunch kits becomes much

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“That certain groups of people are so vulnerable to food insecurity in Canada suggests that social and health inequities are not being effectively addressed. Action is needed at all levels of government to fight the growing prevalence of food insecurity in this country.”

more difficult. Moreover, parents with a limited budget need to be assured that their children will eat what they buy and that they will get the most energy for every food dollar. Again, this often means purchasing more expensive or less healthy foods in an effort to ensure their children don't go hungry. Vulnerabilities in income and social support take away from a sense of control over the food people eat.

Vulnerable people also face an even greater risk for food insecurity from disruptions in other aspects of their lives. Increases in rent, childcare costs, utility rates, fuel costs, or food prices can also eat into limited food budgets. The loss of a job, addition of a new mouth to feed, or onset of an illness can be devastating. Aboriginal people living in urban areas lose the security provided by traditional hunting and fishing activities. If they are living with a low income, such a change can cause severe disruptions to the diet. Elderly or disabled people may have mobility or accessibility issues with purchasing, preparing, or eating food, even when they have sufficient income.

That certain groups of people are so vulnera-

ble to food insecurity in Canada suggests that social and health inequities are not being effectively addressed. Action is needed at all levels of government to fight the growing prevalence of food insecurity in this country:

- Follow the recommendations laid out in *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security*.
- Support and encourage local food policy councils, such as the recently formed Vancouver Food Policy Council.
- Improve the adequacy of social and employment assistance allowances.
- Ensure affordable housing, transportation, and childcare costs for low-income Canadians.
- Protect the affordability of fresh, healthy foods.
- Develop programs and policies to fight food insecurity in schools and workplaces. ■

For more information

Canada's Action Plan for Food Security

- www.agr.gc.ca/misb/fsb/fsb-bsa_e.php?section=fsap&group=plan&page=toc-tdm

UN Food and Agriculture Organization Special Programme for Food Security

- www.fao.org/spfs

Canadian Community Health Survey 2000-01 Food Insecurity Report

- www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050503/d050503b.htm

National Population Health Survey 1998-99 Food Insecurity Report

- www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/010815/d010815a.htm

Canadian Association of Food Banks

- www.cafb-acba.ca



Community kitchens are a community development tool. They help people share knowledge, ideas, cultures, lifestyles—and food. **BY DIANE COLLIS**

Community kitchens: More than just cooking together

WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO MAKE new friends, eat delicious food and have nutritious, diet-appropriate ready-made meals in their freezer? Community kitchens, sharing kitchens, or cooking clubs—whatever you want to call them—offer the opportunity to address all types of social and dietary needs.

A community kitchen is a group of individuals who meet regularly to cook healthy, nutritious meals, bake delicious goods, or preserve and pickle foods. Everyone is expected to participate to the best of their ability in the menu selection, shopping, preparation, and cooking—other than that, the only requirement is an interest in food. Good nutrition plays a key role in each community kitchen regardless of intent. Participants learn new recipes and are introduced to new foods. In many cases, meals are taken home and frozen for later. Members often share nutrition and culinary knowledge as they cook and everyone gains from each other's enthusiasm.

Once merely a food action initiative that

focused on supporting people living on limited incomes, community kitchens have since grown into a recognized and successful community development tool used by community agencies, health organizations, and elementary schools. We have realized that bringing people together around food preparation and meal sharing is an effective way of helping people address their social, nutritional, and lifestyle needs.

“Bringing people together around food preparation and meal sharing is an effective way of helping people address their social, nutritional, and lifestyle needs.”

A diversity of kitchen types presently cook together: vegetarian, food-preserving, multicultural, single parent, pre- and post-natal, diabetes maintenance and prevention, heart smart, as well as kitchens focused on supporting children, youth, families, seniors, new immigrants, and people with various ability and health concerns.

No cookie-cutter approach exists for creating and maintaining a kitchen group. One must respond, honour, and work with the lifestyles and cultures that make up the group. One way to

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demonstrate this is to use the analogy of the community kitchen continuum. On one end of the continuum are kitchen groups who operate through a community agency that might offer a variety of supports to its participants, like a paid coordinator, a well-maintained kitchen in which to work, space to share meals, free childcare, bus tickets, and a nominal fee or no cost to participate. In these types of kitchen groups, the focus is generally on healthy food choices, life skills, health education, family, and social connectedness. On the other end of the continuum are self-directed kitchen groups who run independent of any funding or support. They only require a

community space to cook. Their focus can vary depending on the needs and desires of the participants. Examples of this can be found in gourmet kitchens, vegetarian kitchens, or kitchens for folks who work a lot, feel disconnected to their community, or don't think they are eating as well as they could be.

The YWCA's Crabtree Corner has been running a community kitchen for about ten years now. Through out this time the community kitchen model they have used has changed and evolved over the years. Focused on supporting mothers and their children, this kitchen group includes, amongst the regular community kitchen benefits, a pre-employment component. They run a six-month community kitchen that gathers every other Monday morning. Once the women graduate from the program and obtain their Foodsafe Level 1 certificate, they are invited to cook on alternate Monday mornings for Crabtree's day care. Obtaining food prep work experience supports their efforts in finding employment in the food preparation field.

Kiwassa Neighbourhood House operates a canning community kitchen that invites people in their community to learn about food preservation. Run by a retired nutritionist, Kiwassa offers kitchen and storage space as well as free childcare. The canning group uses local berry patches and fruit trees when they are able. Many of the Kiwassa's participants are recent immigrants and eager to learn how to preserve foods to feed their families.

The Vegetarian Community Kitchen that cooks out of Britannia Community School has

operated for almost seven years. This self-directed kitchen group runs on their own steam and looks only to Britannia for kitchen and storage space. They pitch in their own money for ingredients, bring in their own recipes, and generally look after the entire cooking experience themselves. Whenever one of the six members leaves the kitchen, they have no problem in filling the vacant spot. They are a highly motivated, self-directed group that enjoys the social benefits their community kitchen offers and, of course, the delicious vegetarian meals they share.

The above three kitchens have run in Vancouver for many years but this is not the always the case. Some kitchens operate for only two or three months, a year, two years, or more—it all depends on the motivation of the participants themselves. If the leader of the kitchen, volunteer or not, is doing most of the work or is constantly having trouble encouraging people to participate then perhaps a community kitchen is not the appropriate food action initiative for the group with whom he or she is working. Perhaps the group needs to consider going with a program that is less demanding and then, slowly, as participants are ready, move towards a member-driven initiative, such as a community kitchen. What's important to remember is to begin at a manageable level and work together from there.

The reasons for getting involved in a kitchen may differ but every participant experiences the good food, increase in culinary knowledge, and rich social benefits of their shared efforts. Community kitchens invite people to help themselves, each other, and their communities. ■



Vancouver Community Kitchen Project

Diane Collis is the coordinator of the Vancouver Community Kitchen Project, an educational resource project that promotes and supports community kitchens at various levels of operation. The mission of the project is to build community around food and create opportunities for people to cook together. We gratefully acknowledge our long-term supporter(s), Terasen Inc. working in partnership with the Vancouver Food Bank, REACH Community Health Centre, and Vancouver Coastal Health. For more information visit: www.communitykitchens.ca



The benefits of a municipal focus on food are manyfold—social, environmental, economic. Many cities, Vancouver included, are supporting food policy. **BY SHANNON BRADLEY AND WENDY MENDES**

Creating a just and sustainable food system in the City of Vancouver

ON JULY 8, 2003, following more than a decade of community organizing efforts, Vancouver City Council approved a motion supporting the development of a “just and sustainable food system” for the City of Vancouver. Since the motion, the City’s commitment to food policy has included an eight month consultation process; approval of a Food Action Plan; hiring two dedicated food policy staff; facilitation of a number of food-related initiatives including community gardens, fruit trees, and edible landscaping; project collaborations with a range of partners; and the election of the Vancouver Food Policy Council.

But what prompted all the above activity, what exactly is food policy, and why are increasing numbers of cities recognizing it as a legitimate issue for local governments to address?

What is food policy?

Food policy is an area of municipal planning and policymaking that engages individuals and organizations from all aspects of the food system to consider how the production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and waste management of food impacts our lives and our neigh-

borhoods. Food policy initiatives typically focus on urban agriculture, community gardens, farmers markets, emergency food distribution, food retail access, local food economies, and management of organic waste.

Over recent decades, unprecedented changes in the global food system have led to a growing interest in the ways that improvements to local food systems can support our health, communities, economy, and environment. Concerns stem from a number of issues including declining health and nutrition, increased food bank use in Canada, loss of agricultural lands, and growing distances between producer and consumer. The result is a growing recognition that we are all affected by decisions related to the food system, particularly in cities where the majority of Canadians live.

While a number of decisions related to the food system may be outside of the jurisdiction of local governments, a surprising number of food-related issues fall within local government mandates, including land use decisions, grocery store access, and organic waste. In many cases, food policy is a matter of local governments providing

better facilitation and coordination for activities that are already supported.

Like sustainability, food policy is cross-cutting in nature. As such, food policy initiatives typically result in multiple benefits—social, environmental, and economic—and creative solutions to urban challenges. Food decisions can help determine whether:

- Opportunities to grow food in the city are supported and encouraged;
- A city's most vulnerable populations have access to nutritious and affordable food;
- Food shops and restaurants that cater to multi-cultural tastes;
- Neighbourhoods have grocery stores or farmers markets close by;
- A city's streetscapes feature compact, walkable neighbourhoods that include vibrant outdoor cafés and local food retailers;
- Food-related community-building opportunities are supported and facilitated;
- The local food economy is supported;
- Food packaging and food waste destined for the landfill is diverted to make compost.

Food Policy in Canadian Cities

Vancouver is neither the first nor only Canadian city to integrate food-related issues into its policymaking and planning activities. A growing number of Canadian cities including Kamloops, Merritt, Regina, Toronto, and Montréal also have municipally-endorsed food policies, food-related initiatives and/or food policy councils in place. Vancouver continues to learn a great deal from

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FOOD POLICY IN OTHER CANADIAN CITIES

Kamloops, BC and Merritt, BC: On September 26, 2000, the City of Merritt became the first municipality in B.C. to adopt a food policy statement. The four principals of the statement are:

- Safe and nutritious food is available within the region for all residents
- Access to the safe and nutritious food is not limited by economic status, location, or other factors beyond a resident's control;
- There is a local and regional agriculture and food production system which supplies wholesome food to the region's residents on a sustainable basis;
- All residents have the information and skills to achieve nutritional well-being.

Kamloops has since adopted similar policy principles into its municipal Social Plan.

Montréal, PQ: The City of Montréal has a very extensive and well-supported community gardening program. Metro Montréal includes 15 municipalities that support approximately 100 community gardens. The program is administered by the Department of Culture, Sports, Leisure and Social Development in cooperation with other municipal departments and voluntary gardening organizations. The city provides the land, the equipment, and the materials necessary for the program to function efficiently. It also repairs the equipment, provides water, collects garden refuse, and offers the expertise of horticultural animators as resource personnel.

Regina, SK: The City of Regina Social Development Department, in partnership with Social Services, the Regina & District Food Bank, and REACH, manage and operate the Regina Food Security Project. The project uses the food security model that promotes access to quality and stable food supply.

Toronto, ON: The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) has been instrumental in putting food policy development on the municipal agenda in Toronto. TFPC has produced a ground-breaking series of 15 discussion papers on various elements of a food systems approach to public health policy. Paper topics include "reducing urban hunger," "health and the environment," "commercial food production" and "food security and urban planning."

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the experiences of those cities whose leadership in food policy helped pave the way for Vancouver's evolving food policy successes.

Recent years have seen more coordinated approaches to food policy development in local governments including formalized food charters, pilot projects and food policy councils.

Food Policy Initiatives in Vancouver following the Council Motion in July 2003

Since the approval of the Food Action Plan in December 2003, progress has been made on a number of fronts, including social, environmental and economic sustainability; community development; and environmental health. Much of the progress can be attributed to the concerted efforts of the Vancouver Food Policy Council. All twenty seats of the Food Policy Council are currently filled by a cross-section of highly qualified members of Vancouver's food and agricultural community, including nutritionists, food wholesalers and distributors, food retailers and grocers, non-profit organizations, and academics.

The primary goal of a Food Policy Council is to examine the operation of a local food system and provide ideas and policy recommendations for how it can be improved. The Vancouver Food Policy Council has a mandate make policy recommendations to the City that will promote a sustainable food system. The priorities identified by the Food Policy Council include:

- A Food Charter for the City of Vancouver;
- Strategies to increase access to groceries for residents of Vancouver;
- A coordinated effort to reduce food waste and

redirect food destined for land-fill;

- Review of the potential of an institutional purchasing policy for public facilities.

It is important to note that these initiatives are in early development stages.

In addition to the work of the Food Policy Council, the Food Policy staff team has a number of issues and projects underway. Two examples are outlined below.

1. Researching the Local Food System

Funded by Western Economic Diversification, and completed by a consortium of researchers called Forum of Research Connections (FORC), a food assessment of the City of Vancouver with a focus on the Downtown Eastside is nearing completion. The mandate of the assessment was to identify specific neighbourhoods and populations that are more vulnerable to food insecurity; analyze the food retail sector for factors including access, nutritional quality and affordability; and recommend social enterprise activities that might strengthen access to nutritious food, provide skills training, and present community development opportunities. The final research report will be available by Fall 2005. The findings will inform the continued work of the Vancouver Food Policy Council, Food Policy Staff Team, and a range of community organizations.

2. Increasing opportunities for Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture has been identified as a priority area for Vancouver's food policy work. Urban agriculture initiatives include community gar-

dens, edible landscaping, roof top gardens, and public orchards. Increased support and opportunities to grow food in urban environments yields a range of benefits. Community gardens provide an opportunity for healthy, outdoor recreation in a social setting. Educational sites can also be established in gardens for school children and those interested in the biology of food and habitats. Gardeners of all ages get the opportunity to share plants, stories, and knowledge. Residents can host harvest parties, seed swaps, and community events in these gardens, which would build knowledge and friendship between gardeners and non-gardeners alike. Community gardening is a community development tool as well as a way of improving food security.

Currently the City of Vancouver has 17 community gardens on Park and City property. In order to respond to the growing number of citizens who would like to grow their own food in the city, the Food Policy Staff Team is collaborating with the Park Board in their review of Park Board Community Garden policy. It is anticipated that this work will help to inform the creation of a plan and policy framework for community gardens that are on non-park property. The Food Policy Team is also working with the Park Board to support planting fruit trees on park property. Education programs for the maintenance and pruning of public orchards are under consideration. Further, public education on the importance of urban pollinators, such as honeybees, are also a possibility.

The growth of food in urban areas provides multiple avenues to link citizens with the



processes of nature. Urban agriculture has also been identified as a priority in the South East False Creek neighbourhood, and is reflected in the Official Development Plan.

The Future of Food Policy in Canadian Cities

As Vancouver and other Canadian cities continue to develop food policy initiatives, our collective success will depend on a commitment to collaborative approaches to food system issues, particularly where local government and community groups are concerned. Although challenges remain, there are promising indications of a growing enthusiasm for working together on food-related goals. After all, as Wayne Roberts, Coordinator of the Toronto Food Policy Council describes it: “The way to a city’s heart is through its stomach.” ■

Shannon Bradley and Wendy Mendes are Food Systems Planners for the City of Vancouver. For more information on food policy in Vancouver, including the Vancouver Food Policy Council, please visit:
www.vancouver.ca/foodpolicy

B.C. lagging behind on supports for families with children

B.C. ranks poorly worldwide in supports for families with children, despite the lip service paid by the government. Immediate monetary support is required, writes **Andrea Long**.

IN THE 2005 BUDGET SPEECH, finance minister Colin Hansen stated that it is a government priority to deliver ‘the best for our children:’

‘I expect that every member of this House shares the government’s commitment to ensure that all our children get the best possible start in life. Of course it’s parents and family members who make the most important contributions to children’s healthy development. But government also has a role in making sure that BC continues to be *the best place to raise a family*.’¹

Making B.C. the best place to raise a family is a worthy goal, but recent research by SPARC BC and UBC’s Human Early Learning Partnership suggests that we are a long way from achieving it. Data on benefits available to families with children demonstrates that this province is lagging behind internationally. Little was accomplished to improve this situation between 2001 and 2004, with benefits remaining largely static.

What are child benefits?

Child benefits are supports available to help families with the cost of raising children. They include cash benefits, subsidies to help cover service fees, and tax deductions or credits. Support is provided by the federal government

through the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB), the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS), and a variety of other income tax measures. The province delivers the Family Bonus, the Earned Income Benefit, and subsidies to assist with health and child care costs. Support and shelter benefits for families receiving provincial income assistance are also included in child benefit calculations. For most of these programs, benefit levels are indexed to net income—support decreases as earned income increases.

The value of the supports listed above—what we call the child benefit package (CBP)—is determined by comparing the disposable income enjoyed by families with children to the disposable income of childless couples. Both family size and net income affect the value of the supports families are eligible to receive.

B.C. at the bottom worldwide

Data on the value of the CBP is available not only for B.C., but for a range of other countries. B.C. is well below other jurisdictions in terms of the value of supports for families with children.

The international comparators in the table above span more than the social democratic

¹ www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/speech/default.htm. Emphasis added.

Value of the Child Benefit Package in Canadian Dollars			Child Benefit Package as a Percentage of Average Earnings		
Rank	Country	\$Value	Rank	Country	%
1	United Kingdom	\$554	1	Norway	9.8%
2	Norway	\$339	2	Sweden	8.7%
3	Germany	\$287	3	United Kingdom	8.6%
4	Sweden	\$273	4	Finland	8.2%
5	Finland	\$265	5	Germany	7.6%
6	Netherlands	\$204	6	Iceland	5.6%
7	Iceland	\$200	7	Netherlands	4.5%
8	British Columbia	\$165	8	British Columbia	4.4%

Scandinavian countries often highlighted in discussions of progressive childcare and family policy. The U.K.—a liberal democracy with a political heritage like our own—far outperforms British Columbia. This is in large part the result of actions to realize the U.K. government’s ambitious commitment to eliminate child poverty by 2020. Unlike the limited success of Canadian measures to achieve the 1989 all-party resolution to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000, in the U.K. the number of children in low-income households dropped by 500,000 between 1998-99 and 2002-03.²

Lots of talk... little action

Data on B.C.’s CBP in 2001 and 2004 reveals little change in the value of available supports over this period. The increases recorded by some families are worth less than \$20 per month, while many other families experienced modest declines. For some, the CBP changed little between 2001 and 2004 because the level and operation of benefits remained fairly constant. In other cases, federal supports through the CCTB and the NCBS increased in value, but these

increases were counteracted by higher provincial health care premiums that resulted in greater expenses for families.

Persons receiving income assistance are among those for whom the value of benefits dropped due to cuts to support and shelter benefits. Families with various levels of earned

income also experienced declines. The largest decrease of \$139 per month was recorded by a single parent with one child under age 3 earning half of the average income in B.C. (just over \$21,000 annually). This larger drop is explained by reductions to the child care subsidy threshold, which reduced the assistance available to some parents. For all families using child care, service fees have a large negative affect on the value of the CBP. In several cases, child care costs produce a negative child benefit.

Conclusion

From an international perspective, research on the value of the CBP shows us that B.C. is a long way from realizing the goal of being the ‘best place to raise a family.’ Despite talk of targeting assistance to those ‘most in need’ and improving the outlook for families, the lack of investment in child care and the privatization of health care costs has undermined the support available to many families with children. ■

2 *Child Poverty Review*. July 2004. London: HM Treasury, p. 5. www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/44F/77/childpoverty_chapt_290704.pdf

The value of supported participation in the dialogue process

Sarah Slack, assistant executive director at SPARC BC, shares her reflections on the 3D project and its success in supporting a group of youth with developmental disabilities as they participated in SPARC BC and SFU's provincial dialogue on accessibility in April.

I CRIED AT WORK A FEW MONTHS AGO. I was listening to the stories of Ryan, Katherine, Adam, Veronica, Jenny Lynn, Krista, Sianne, and Jordana. They are members of the 3D Group, who opened “Beyond the Obvious: Exploring the Accessible Community,” a dialogue event presented by SPARC BC and SFU’s Dialogue Program on April 22, 2005, by telling their stories of living with disabilities and their solutions for ways to move beyond the obvious in making the communities in which they live more accessible. They told their stories with emotion—humour, anger, pain, passion—honesty, and courage.

John Forester is a writer and professor of planning who emphasize the importance of dialogue, listening, and storytelling in his work. He has profoundly influenced and inspired my own

understanding of inclusive and ethical planning practices. Forester calls listening the “social policy of everyday life.”¹ He contrasts the passive act of hearing, with the active, relationship-building process of listening. He writes “by being attentive—demonstrating an attitude of caring involvement, inquiry and wonder—our listening can foster mutuality and dialogue.” Forester’s research involves collecting, then recounting the stories of planners who seek to act ethically and morally in the face of power.

Dialogue processes encourage a spirit of curiosity, listening to understand, speaking from personal experience, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and equality. Some of these ideals can be difficult to achieve in practice. Creating a sup-

“Dialogue creates space for storytelling and listening. Telling stories breaks down hierarchy and everyone has a story to tell. You don’t need a PhD to tell a compelling story, as the 3D group so aptly demonstrated.”

¹ Forester, John. *Planning in the Face of Power*. 1989. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

ported participation project (the 3D Project) for the Dialogue on Accessibility allowed the ideal of equality to become more of a reality and facilitated the possibility of learning from people's personal experiences of living with disabilities, and diverse perspectives on how to go beyond the obvious in creating more accessible, inclusive communities.

Dialogue processes are powerful because they create space for storytelling and listening. Telling stories breaks down hierarchy. Everyone has a story to tell, and you don't have to have a PhD to tell a compelling story, as the 3D group so aptly demonstrated.

The 3D program was established to allow self-advocates with developmental disabilities an opportunity to form a self-support group where they could explore the issues of accessibility, while learning about the dialogue process. SPARC BC initiated the program out of a recognition that participants with developmental disabilities may need extra support in order to participate in the dialogue process. SPARC BC partnered with the BC Association for Community Living's Pathways to Citizenship project that is sponsored by Social Development Canada. This partnership made the participation of the 3D group members possible, and made it possible for me and the other people who attended the



dialogue to learn from their experience. Everyone benefited from their inclusion. They 3D members benefited by having an opportunity to tell their stories, and the dialogue participants benefited from listening to their stories.

As I was listening to the stories of the 3D group, the tears welled up in my eyes for many different reasons. I was thinking of the kind of life my nephew with Down's Syndrome will live—and the kind of accessible and inclusive community I wish for him. I was moved by the intensity of emotion in the stories of the 3D group that I rarely encounter in my work life, but that is instructive and transformative because it allows me an opportunity to learn from people's lived experience. I was also thinking how proud I am to be working at SPARC BC, an organization that recognizes the importance of inclusion, and that works to provide opportunities for supported participation. ■

International food rights start at home

Canada lacks public discourse on food policy and the right to food. **Graham Riches** suggests that we embrace the UN's guidelines on food policy and place the issue at the centre of our social policy and judicial decision-making.

THE SOCIAL POLICY DEBATE, within B.C. and across Canada, needs to embrace the emerging global human rights discourse increasingly promoted on the international stage by UN bodies such as the Food and Agricultural Organisation and the Commission on Human Rights, by civil society organisations such as the World Social Forum, FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), Rights and Democracy (ICHRRD, Montreal) and by nations like Brazil, Norway, and South Africa.

Food is a basic need and a fundamental human right. As such it is central to any informed discussion of the nature and direction of social policy concerned with the choices societies make about collective social arrangements and welfare. Canada, and most certainly in B.C., needs to revisit this question given that social policy and citizenship rights have fallen off government agendas. We hear only about health and education these days. Politicians, at all levels and of all stripes, consistently fail to promote the right to food in combatting deeply entrenched hunger and food insecurity.

The result has been the re-institutionalisation of charity since the early 1980's in the guise of the food bank industry as the last line of defense against the alarming growth of food poverty in Canada. This provides clear evidence of the

breakdown of the public safety net and the stripping away of economic and social entitlements, confirmed by the demise of the Canada Assistance Plan in 1996. The prevalence of food banking points to the deplorable lack of political will to address the food needs of Canada's most vulnerable populations.

Specifically, the struggle against food insecurity here at home needs to be informed by Canada's ratification of the UN *Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights* (CESCR, 1976) and by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982, s. 7 [personal security] and s.15 [equality rights]). The facts about food poverty are startling. The recent Canadian Community Health Survey reports that at some point in 2001, 3.7 million Canadians (15% of the population) including 560,000 British Columbians (17%) were living in 'food-insecure households' (Health Reports, Statistics Canada, 2005). In 2004, 840,000 people a month across Canada were dependent on emergency food aid from charitable food banks, an increase of 123% since 1989. By 2004, B.C. food banks were feeding 84,000 men, women, and children. Also in 2004, 47% of food banks nationwide reported they had difficulty in meeting demand (CAFB, 2004).

For government social policy makers and civil

society advocates the lessons are clear. First, it is imperative that leaders pay attention to the UN Economic and Social Council's declaration that 'the right to food does not mean handing out free food to everyone' but 'rather that governments must respect, protect and fulfill the right to food' thereby ensuring domestic compliance with their obligations under the CESC. Such injunctions apply equally to provincial governments. This means adopting economic and social policies that recognize the right of all Canadians to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including food, clothing, and shelter (Article 11, CESC, 1976), and the strengthening of Canada's social safety net. It also means adopting the recently approved UN *Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food* (2004) and implementing a coordinated national action plan for food security directed at the optimal nourishment of the population.

Second, Canadians need to act on the justifiability of the human right to adequate food. We should seek remedies through the *Charter* and the courts to oblige governments 'to respect, protect, and fulfill' the right to food, or in other words, to guarantee adequate welfare benefits for vulnerable populations. To date, Supreme Court judgments have not required governments to guarantee the meeting of basic needs (e.g., Gosselin, 2002) although the minority judgment in that case—written by Mme Justice Louise Arbour, now the UN Commissioner for Human Rights—did assert that governments are obliged to meet them, though it is not for the courts to determine how this should be accom-

plished. This is an important defence of the rights of vulnerable and hungry Canadians.

If we place the right to food at the centre of social policy and judicial decision-making, our society would be obliged to achieve food security and would be bound by a national framework of law and be subject to UN human rights discourse and monitoring. Importantly, the understanding of food as a right encourages social policy to play a central and integrative role, along with health and environmental policy, in strengthening *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security* (1998). Such an effort would ensure that policy is properly directed at the overall nourishment and wellbeing of all Canadians. ■

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SPARC BC researcher Michael Goldberg honoured with Weiler Award

Long-time activist, advocate, and researcher Michael Goldberg was recently presented with the Weiler Award for his contributions and commitment to the field of social justice and development in Canada.

MICHAEL GOLDBERG, A RESEARCHER and advocate with SPARC BC for the last eighteen years, was recently presented with the Weiler Award to acknowledge and honour his exceptional contributions to community and social development in Canada. The award is sponsored by the Weiler Award Trust, which was established shortly after the death of noted humanitarian Dick Weiler in 1995. Presented annually, the award recognizes outstanding dedication by individuals, groups or organizations to social development or social justice causes through cooperative linkages and collaboration among individuals, groups, agencies, and organizations.

Michael Goldberg has worked in the social development arena in the Vancouver area since 1970. He has worked in neighbourhood houses

and for various levels of government, but is most well known for his work at SPARC BC. He is particularly recognized in B.C. for his incisive social commentary and his skills as a leader, facilitator, and mediator.

Michael has played a pivotal role in First Call, a British Columbian coalition of individuals and organizations whose mission is to create a greater understanding of and advocacy for legislation, policy, and practice to ensure that all children and youth have the opportunities and resources required to achieve their full potential. By providing sustained leadership to the building of this broad-based coalition, he has

been an enduring catalyst for extensive collaboration and cooperation.

Michael is committed to the concept of participative, community-based research. In his

“Michael’s talents go well beyond research and writing. His exceptional ‘people skills’ are reflected in his effective public speaking, his incisive and articulate interviews, and his considerable skill in community consultation, facilitation, mediation, and conciliation.”

research, Michael always finds a way to ensure that the grass-roots perspective comes through—that everyone gets a voice. This was particularly evident in the development of the Regional Homeless Plan Update, which involved numerous consultative workshops and “kitchen table” focus groups throughout Greater Vancouver.

Michael is also known and respected for living his values. He promotes collaborative service planning, as he believes that organizations should not compete with each other for resources. Each community project Michael has worked on could identify a legacy from the experience, whether it's improved capacity, new knowledge or skills, better policy development, or just a positive experience with lots of humour.

Michael's talents go well beyond research and writing. He is widely known and respected in British Columbia for his “people skills,” which are reflected in his effective public speaking, his incisive and articulate interviews, and his considerable skill in community consultation, facilitation, mediation, and conciliation.

We at SPARC BC are indeed lucky to have Michael as a part of our organization. ■



Back at it. Michael Goldberg, the Weiler Award on the wall beside him, gets back to work in his office at SPARC BC.

“It is not someone else’s responsibility to tackle our social problems and injustices. It is up to us. We will have to learn how to develop meaningful partnerships, because if we work together, support each other, and don’t quit, we can make a difference.”

—Dick Weiler

Make Poverty History:

A global campaign to eradicate poverty

Over 10 million children die every year in extreme poverty. With the Make Poverty History campaign, and its worldwide support, it feels like—for the first time in a long time—an individual can make a difference, writes **Salima Jethani**.

IT WAS A RAINY THURSDAY NIGHT in Vancouver and I was in front of the TV watching a sitcom, trying to forget how difficult my workday was. I usually run to the fridge during the commercial breaks but this time a public service advertisement caught my eye. It was a white background with Brad Pitt wearing a white wristband snapping his fingers, then Bono, then George Clooney and other celebrities I recognized. The voice in the background said, “Every 3 seconds, a child dies in extreme poverty. Snap. Somebody’s daughter, somebody’s son. Snap. There goes another one. Snap. And this is totally preventable. Snap. Make Poverty History. Join the Campaign.”

I was floored. I know that the *gap between the world’s rich and poor is getting wider everyday*. I know that it isn’t chance or bad luck that keeps people trapped in bitter, unrelenting poverty. I also know that factors like imbalanced global trade systems, debt burdens for developing

countries, and insufficient and ineffective aid continue to exacerbate poverty.

But, I always think about what I can do about this—I am only one person—what in the world could I do that would make a difference?

Well, for one, an unprecedented global movement of people committed to ending poverty is afoot. This campaign to “make poverty history” is now in full swing in more than fifty countries worldwide. And Canada is one of them.

This campaign is not only one that tugs at your sense of global responsibility but, almost more importantly, the

campaign is strategic and lays out concrete ways to actually get the job done.

Back in 2001, the governments of the eight wealthiest nations on the planet said that they were going to do something about it. In what was seen as a breakthrough, they promised to halve world poverty by 2015. This was deemed the number one Millennium Development Goal.

“The gap between the world’s rich and poor is getting wider everyday. I know that it isn’t chance or bad luck that keeps people trapped in bitter, unrelenting poverty.”

Four years later, the world is failing dismally to reach this target.

Make Poverty History believes that by ensuring trade justice, debt cancellation, and more and better aid for the world's poorest countries, and by focusing on eradicating child poverty, that poverty can indeed be a thing of the past. The Campaign will focus on three key international events: the G8 Summit on July 2nd, the UN review of the Millennium Development Goals on September 10th, and the World Trade Organization meeting on December 10th.

Inspired by the global movement, the BC Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC), the umbrella group for many of Canada's aid and development agencies, in partnership with SPARC BC, First Call, Canadian Crossroads International, Co-development Canada, and a host of anti-poverty activists and citizens committed to the issue, launched the Make Poverty History Campaign in Vancouver. Organized in two short weeks, over 100 people attended the launch at SFU's Harbour Centre and signed on to the global campaign to eradicate poverty. At the launch, Jean Swanson, a well-known anti-poverty activist delivered the keynote address followed by a passionate speech by a 19-year-old named Alex Natross.

Following this initiative, the recent U2 con-

certs in Vancouver inspired St. Andrew's Wesley Church to don a white band around its steeple and challenged other churches to follow suit.

Since the launch in April, a dozens of diverse organizations have come together to support events in B.C. and will continue to play a lead

"Imbalanced global trade systems, debt burdens for developing countries, and insufficient and ineffective aid continue to exacerbate poverty and leave millions to die needlessly every year. Make Poverty History encourages every one of us to get involved and help make poverty a thing of the past."

during the coming months. Volunteers from all walks of life have come forward at an astounding rate to lend their hands and voices to this campaign.

For the first time in a long time it feels like one person in one Canadian city can make a difference. We need to stand together in the city of Vancouver, the province of British Columbia, the country of Canada, and around the world to Make Poverty History. ■

If you are interested in joining the campaign, please visit the campaign website at www.makepovertyhistory.ca. If you are in Vancouver and would like to lend a hand or voice, please contact Salima Jethani at bccic@web.ca or call (604) 899-4475.

Grandview U’uqinak’uuh community schoolyard: Fertile ground

The community garden at Grandview U’uqinak’uuh schoolyard is a model of small-scale community development. **Zoe Welch** shares the story of the schoolyard and its significance to the Grandview community.

GRANDVIEW U’UQINAK’UUH COMMUNITY Schoolyard is aptly named—U’uqinak’uuh means “grand view” in Nuuchal-Nulth—with a panorama that takes in the North shore mountains, the inner harbour, and Vancouver’s downtown skyline in between, the view is indeed grand. And, with a one-acre school yard that includes a thirty-plot community garden, an ethnobotanical garden, a bird and butterfly garden, and a natural drainage pond, the spirit of nature—the schoolyard’s name—is indeed present. Curiously, this unique elementary school is located next door to Vancouver’s downtown east-side, an area known famously for having

Canada’s poorest postal code. So here, where means are slim, an inner-city oasis has been created for the school children, their families, and their neighbours—and others have taken note.

Regarded by many as a model community garden project, the Grandview U’uqinak’uuh Community Schoolyard has attracted over one hundred visitors for tours from the school’s Director of Healthy Community Programs, Jen Harrison, in the last two years. Jen’s role includes coordinating and cultivating the connections between the schoolyard’s many offerings, the school’s kids, and the surrounding community. Food is fundamental to this com-



munity initiative.

The community garden is at full capacity with thirty cultivated plots. One plot is reserved for school use where flowers and vegetables are grown, and the other plots are used by school parents and grandparents, and by neighbours. The schoolchildren help with the garden at recess and lunch, planting, weeding, and har-



vesting either their own family's plot, or the school's. Jen says that the kids are great gardeners; they have a good sense of what's going on, of how to plant, and they know what to look for. The garden is a huge point of pride for the kids, nobody else has this, Jen explains. And it's for everyone. Last year, the school's garden plot sprouted an entire crop of self-seeded lettuce—enough to feed ninety people at family night.

The ethnobotanical garden contains plants that are culturally relevant for medicinal, ceremonial, and food purposes. Here the kids also help as part of the school's Elders' Cooking Club. The club's weekly dinner is part of its mentoring program in which five strong elders have been matched with parents who are more isolated or experiencing challenging times. The families and elders come together weekly when an elder goes to the garden with the kids to gather herbs.

The elder teaches the children about the herbs, tells stories during dinner, and talks to the family about what's going on for their people.

The schoolyard greenery also serves as a classroom, feeding mind and the imagination: during art class, the children come out to draw; in science class, they come out to look for bugs; for math, they turned benches into rulers. One garden's fence was even refashioned as an abacus.

Grandview U'uqinak'uuh Schoolyard isn't just aptly named, it's aptly conceived. Offering food as a community nexus draws on traditions common to all humanity. The gardens tap the nutritional, cultural, social, and educational interests of the school community, cultivating connections to learning and to people that can take root and grow. On Vancouver's eastside where greenspace is scarce, this is indeed fertile ground. ■

What is Web accessibility?

Making a nebulous concept more concrete

Making a website accessible for everyone, **Glenda Watson Hyatt** explains, is not a simple process. But with modern technologies and standards—and a little common sense—accessible design can benefit all your visitors.

A FEW WEEKS AGO, my aunt and uncle were over for pizza and my uncle mentioned his church now has a website. I jokingly asked, “Is it accessible?” He responded emphatically, “Of course it is, it’s online!”

Unfortunately, it is not quite that simple. Having a website online does not necessarily mean it is accessible to everyone. Many factors, including individual capabilities, disabilities, and differing computer systems can affect how well individuals can access Web pages. For some, surfing the World Wide Web is not as simple as “point and click.”

For the most part, it is understood that people with disabilities face barriers in navigating buildings and their surroundings. Design features like wheelchair parking spaces, grab bars in the washrooms, visual fire alarms, Braille signage, and other accommodations can assist people with disabilities in moving around and interacting with the physical world.

Similarly, people with disabilities face barriers when using computers and experiencing the full range of content available. Some important Web accessibility considerations include:

- People with visual impairments and some types of learning disabilities rely on text-to-speech software that reads aloud text on the

computer screen. These screen readers cannot interpret images, graphs, maps, or graphically represented information, so when content is provided only in this way it is invisible to these individuals. Further, not all text is accessible, either; for example, blinking and scrolling text can also cause problems for screen reading software.

- Flickering or flashing designs can cause seizures in people with certain neurological disorders.
- Without captioning of audio content, people with hearing impairments cannot appreciate multimedia content such as online newscasts, movies, and lectures.
- For individuals with little or no hand control, using a mouse can be very difficult. Being required to “click” on a tiny area to access information can be an obstacle.
- Poor page layout and information design can disorient and confuse users, particularly those with cognitive impairments.

In the physical world, the British Columbia Building Code details how to build barrier-free facilities. Similarly, the internationally accepted Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provide guidance for minimizing accessibility barriers encountered on the Web. Many Web accessibili-

ty policies are derived from these guidelines.

Some Web designers may feel such guidelines—and in some jurisdictions, legislation— infringe upon their artistic and creative freedom. No doubt architects had a similar reaction when accessible building codes were first introduced. After all, some may have wondered how could something as uninspiring as a wheelchair ramp be included in a graceful design? However, as has been proven many times over, with ingenuity and creativity, it is possible. With that same ingenuity and creativity, Web designers can develop creative and appealing sites while implementing accessible design principles.

Just as ramps and sidewalk curb cuts benefit parents pushing baby strollers, people making deliveries, and many others, as well as people using wheelchairs, accessible websites also benefit those without disabilities. These are the carry-over or auxiliary benefits of universal design—design that includes everyone. Accessible Web sites also increase usability for these groups:

- Older people with deteriorating vision and shaky hands benefit from adjustable font size and keyboard interaction, rather than using only a mouse;
- People with low literacy and non-native speakers benefit from plain language and consistent navigation;
- People with low-bandwidth connections to the Internet and older technologies benefit from text descriptions of images for when they turn off images to decrease wait times;
- Users with alternative access devices, like cell

phones or very old computers, benefit when sites remain fully functional when scripts, applets, or other programmatic objects are turned off or not supported; and

- New Web users benefit from clear and consistent design, navigation, and linking.

People with disabilities are often excluded from various aspects of society, largely due to inaccessible buildings and services. When an organization's Web site is not accessible, it further excludes people with disabilities. When an organization's Web site is made accessible—just as when a building is made accessible—it empowers people with disabilities to participate more fully in society. Providing accessible a Web site is one way an organization can demonstrate that it strives to be inclusive and respectful of the needs of a diverse society. ■

Useful Resources

AccessibleContent Magazine

- www.accessiblecontent.com

Fact Sheet for "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0"

- www.w3.org/1999/05/WCAG-REC-fact

Guild of Accessible Web Designers

- www.gawds.org

Simplified Web Accessibility Guide

- www.workinfonet.bc.ca/webaccessguides

Web Accessibility Initiative

- www.w3.org/WAI

Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM)

- www.webaim.org/

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0

- www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10

Glenda can be reached a glenda@webaccessibility.biz.

Who's planting the seeds of HEALth?

MaryAnne Arcand is the coordinator of HEAL, an award-winning, B.C.-grown community health project. The project continues to bear the fruit of good planning, a practical approach, and endless enthusiasm.

SO OFTEN WE NORTHERNERS complain that the southern half of the province of B.C. gets all the “goodies” and has all the advantages. And most British Columbians, when they think of “growing,” envision sunny vineyards and orchards in the Okanagan, or verdant fields in the Fraser Valley, not small villages buried in snow from October to March. But one thing we have in the north is a “can-do” attitude. So what if it snows half the year? Plant a garden anyway!

So what if we live in small communities without a Starbucks or high-speed Internet access? We get together and communicate anyway! So what if we are spread over a geographic area the size of Texas? We're neighbours anyway!

It was in that spirit of defying the odds and pulling together to make things happen for ourselves that the Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) project started. When Health Canada announced funding for diabetes Type II prevention in 2001, the community nutritionists throughout the north got together to write a very ambitious proposal to cover the whole region. Health stats in the northern health region are dismal when compared to the southern, more populated areas of the province, and we are at

higher risk for many chronic diseases, particularly diabetes. We also have the highest percentage of Aboriginal people (13% compared to the provincial 3%), who are at disproportionately high risk for diabetes and other diseases.

The plan was simple: let communities decide what they needed to combat Type II Diabetes, and give them some funding and support to do that. By making ‘seed’ money available, HEAL offered support and start-up funds for commu-

nity groups to move their own visions forward, nurture them and let them take root in the community's identity and culture.

A region-wide network was formed consisting of hugely diverse groups of people—farmers, organic

growers, nutritionists, educators, health professionals, early childhood educators, mental health workers, First Nations, administrators, government staff, social activists, restauranteurs, entrepreneurs, youth, food producers, retailers, wholesalers, food processors, and many more. Together they envisioned what healthy Northern B.C. communities could look like, and then did the groundwork in their own districts, getting buy-ins from local groups and individuals to willing to take on a Healthy Eating or Active

“So often we northerners complain that the southern half of the province gets all the ‘goodies’ and has all the advantages. But one thing we have in the north is a ‘can-do’ attitude.”

Living project. Groups applied to HEAL for seed funding and got going. Initially, fifteen communities were involved in nineteen projects, with over 1100 participants. Projects that were funded were as diverse as the people and communities putting them together—Good Food Box programs, community gardens, community kitchens, trail development, development of food policies, and more.

Just as seeds planted in a garden yield many times over, so the initial investment of seed money from HEAL grew in each community. We estimate that for every dollar provided through the Health Canada funding, the communities generated four times that in matching funds and in-kind donations, making this model of “growth” a very good investment of health promotion dollars. A recent follow-up evaluation (December 2004) indicates that of the nineteen projects funded in 2001-02, fifteen are still operating in some form or other. Those communities took ownership of the project, and have been harvesting the results ever since.

HEAL is managed by a sixteen-member Advisory Committee from ten communities in partnership with the Northern Health Authority. The committee determined early that the project would be about building sustainable initiatives and community capacity. HEAL held nine development workshops in the first year alone. Annual gatherings brought project groups, the Advisory, and other interested folks together to share their work, get refreshed and inspired, teach skills, and continue building the vision.

Communication is key to keeping such a large

network going. More than 300 people subscribe to the HEAL newsletter, representing 45 communities and 189 organizations; twelve newsletters have been published to date. The HEAL website, www.healbc.ca, received more than 50,000 hits its first year, but now receives more than that every month. It has become a site for resources, ideas, and success stories. Descriptions of the projects and communities involved in HEAL are there, as well as our evaluation documents and learnings about what worked and what didn't. We have also produced a video based on our first four years' experiences, and a companion learning guide is in the works.

The HEAL model has been extremely successful, winning several awards, as well as being cited by B.C.'s Auditor General as a Diabetes Type II prevention model that should be replicated across the province, and mentioned by the federal Minister of State for Public Health, Hon. Carolyn Bennett, as a cost-effective, sensible, and successful approach to health promotion.

What's next? We plan to get involved in the Act Now! strategy of the province, which aims to ensure and increase access to of fruits and vegetables across British Columbia. And HEAL has taken on a new life, as the Northern BC Healthy Eating and Active Living Society—no longer just a project, but an entity and ideal that will go on planting the seeds of HEALth in the north for many seasons to come. ■

For more information on HEAL, go to www.healbc.ca or contact HEAL Coordinator MaryAnne Arcand at (250) 612-7086 or marcand@uniserve.com.

Growing a food organization

by **Sarah Slack**

COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS not only bring people together to grow, harvest, and share food, they help communities sink stronger roots and blossom with friendship and cooperation. These projects are about making connections: between people and food, and amongst members of a community. Here is how you can help to nurture relationships in your community and create connections between food and people.

1. Look for community food opportunities.

- Have you noticed fruit trees in people's yards or on city property that have ripe fruit falling to the ground?
- Do you have a neighbour that is always trying to give you more zucchini that you could ever use?
- See if any elderly people in your community are no longer able to plant gardens in their yard, but would love to have vegetables growing as they always have.
- Look for abandoned lots, or city-owned pieces of land in your area that could be put to more productive use.

2. Consider people in your community who don't have enough food to eat, or a place to grow their own food.

- Many people in every community cannot afford to pay for healthy food for themselves and their families.
- Many people would love to grow or harvest fruit and vegetables but do not have space.

3. Find ways to connect excess food or underused

land with people who can put it to good use.

- Excess fruit from backyard or city trees can be donated to a food bank, seniors' home, community agency, or drop-in centre.
- Seniors can share their unused garden space with someone who wants to grow their own vegetables, in exchange for a portion of the harvest.
- An abandoned lot or underused space in the city can be used to create a community garden for people who live in apartments or who are tenants without access to garden space in their homes.

To sustain a community food project and maintain relationships in the long-term, you should remember a few things:

- Always get permission from the appropriate people before using land to cultivate food or before harvesting.
- Don't try to start a project all on your own. In many community food initiatives, the biggest challenge is an abundance of riches—more food than a few could eat or more harvest work than a few could hope to complete. Work with a group of people in your community to spread the work around, and get broad support for the initiative.
- Working in a group also makes things fun. One of the best ways to do this is to share food together as you decide how best to create connections between the food, land, and people in your community. ■

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I authorize SPARC BC to withdraw from my chequing account on the ____ day of each month, beginning _____, 20____, for the amount indicated above. (Please include a cheque marked "void").

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www.makepovertyhistory.ca

A simple White Band is the symbol of the Make Poverty History campaign.

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