

“To attract and keep citizens, you need services, amenities, and infrastructure. You need fiber-optic cables and decent roads. You need programs to help the community’s poor, disabled, or unfortunate. You need recreation centres, decent health care, and high-calibre, dependable schools.”

CHRIS TENOVE



Infrastructure

Public Infrastructure for Tomorrow

We need to embrace a broader definition of public built infrastructure and better understand how investments in social infrastructure complement ‘hard’ infrastructure.

PAGE 5

Smart Growth on the Ground

A look at an innovative program to change the way that development is done in B.C.

PAGE 9

(Re) Introducing Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure is merely another way to view the inter-relatedness between community services, public works, and people’s needs.

PAGE 12

The Infrastructure of Community

The design and planning of a neighbourhood—its infrastructure—is essential to its vitality.

PAGE 15

Roads, sewers, and power (and a consciousness-supporting honest discourse)

IN THE MOST RECENT EDITION of *SPARC BC News*, where we looked at taxes, I closed my message by asking us all to consider how we can each support the infrastructure necessary in a just and healthy society for all. Assuming for the moment that we can grapple with the issues of “just and healthy,” what the heck do we mean by “necessary infrastructure?” We hope this edition will enhance our collective understanding.

Well-constructed infrastructure supports development. Build a few good roads with accessible public transit and people are able to travel and trade more easily, they can better utilize services, participate in the community, and increase their quality of life. Our challenge is to move from a straightforward, physical example like this to a paradigm with less tangible, more holistic conceptions of infrastructure, conceptions that support the work done together as people in a society.

We see the role of SPARC BC as fundamentally creating infrastructure. We connect people, we gather and share information, we contribute to an improved understanding of our world around us, and we strengthen the fabric of communities (both within and between them). As esoteric as all this sounds, we believe this to be as important as the wires and pipes going into our homes and buildings, and all the other physical

infrastructure around us. Social infrastructure exists within our networks, knowledge infrastructure stems from our research, cultural infrastructure is inherent in our work with aboriginal communities, and an ecological infrastructure even underlies our use of natural resources. All these “infrastructures” interconnect to reinforce and strengthen (or weaken) each other, and it is important that our perspective and planning take account.

Social planning, in its best applications, provides a lens for viewing infrastructure that seeks to expand rather than narrow our focus in viewing the future. By strategically developing various forms of infrastructure, our development work in community creates more positive feedback loops and more inclusive results. Please join us in this effort to build things better.



DEREK GENT
PRESIDENT, SPARC BC



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



FOCUS ON

Infrastructure

- 5 **Public Infrastructure for Tomorrow: A Case for Housing**
Russell Mawby, Steve Pomeroy, Duncan MacLennan, David Hay
- 9 **Smart Growth on the Ground: Action-based, Meaningful Sustainability Planning**
Jodie Siu
- 12 **(Re) Introducing Social Infrastructure**
Nythalah Baker
- 15 **The Infrastructure of Community**
WeiHsi Hu

ACCESSIBILITY

- 18 **On-Street Parking for People with Disabilities**
Doug Louie
- 28 **The BC Community Accessibility Network Continues to Grow**
Nick Istvanffy

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- 21 **Learning Initiatives for Rural and Northern BC**
- 29 **Regional Forum on Vancouver Island**
- 29 **CSPN BC Focuses on the Municipal Roles in Supporting Social Planning**

INCOME SECURITY

- 25 **Most Recent Stats: B.C. Has the Worst Child Poverty Rate in Canada**
Rebecca Siggner
- 30 **Denied Assistance: Closing the Front Door on Welfare in B.C.**
Bruce Wallace

COMMUNITY EXTRAS

- 22 **The second BC/Yukon Aboriginal Forum on Homelessness Research**
Frances Tang-Graham
- 32 **A Social Work Student's Practicum Experience and Emerging Vision of Community Practice**
Ramona Schucroft

TOOLS FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

24

TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING

- 34 **The Infrastructure of Partnerships**

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201 – 221 East 10th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5T 4V3

Phone (604) 718-7733
Fax (604) 736-8697
Email info@sparc.bc.ca
Website www.sparc.bc.ca

Send feedback and comments to info@sparc.bc.ca

Executive Director
Nancy Henderson

Editor and Production Manager
Matthew Beall

Printing
Broadway Printers 

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SPARC BC
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EMAIL INFO@SPARC.BC.CA

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CONTRIBUTORS

We would like to thank those volunteers who have generously shared their knowledge and expertise in this issue of *SPARC BC News*.

Nythalah Baker is the former coordinator of the BC Rural Women's Network. Over the past ten years she has been involved with community development initiatives, anti-oppressive public education strategies, and adult education instruction.

David Hay joined Canadian Policy Research Network as the Director of the Family Network in July 2004. Previously, David was with the Canadian Institute for Health Information. He has many years of experience in the areas of population health, well-being, and social development.

WeiHsi Hu is a Project Coordinator at SPARC BC and a Planning Consultant for the Action for Neighbourhood Change Project. He has been a community developer for the past eight years, and he is currently completing his Masters of Music at the University of Alberta.

Maureen LeBourdais is the coordinator of the BC Rural Network, a coalition committed to building the capacity of British Columbia to develop responses to rural and remote community issues.

Doug Louie, M. Eng. P. Eng, is the Parking Management Engineer at the City of Vancouver. He has a master's degree in Civil Engineering from the University of British Columbia and is a member of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C., the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and the Canadian Parking Association.

Duncan Maclellan is an applied economist interested in the functioning of housing markets, neighbourhoods, cities, and regions. He has advised governments around the world. In 2004–05 he was Chief Economist in the State of Victoria, Australia.

Russell Mawby is Director of the Housing Branch for the City of Ottawa, and is responsible for programs and funding for social housing, homelessness, affordable housing development, and neighbourhood strategic planning. Russell founded the Collaborative Housing Society in 1991.

Steve Pomeroy specializes in affordable housing policy and research. Since 1994, Steve has authored over seventy policy and research reports, developed housing strategies for a number of provinces and municipalities, and advised national and provincial associations on housing policy issues.

Ramona Schucroft was a practicum student at SPARC BC. She is completing her Master of Social Work at the University of Victoria.

Bruce Wallace is the Research Director at the Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group. Bruce has an MSW from Carleton University, a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Calgary and is a sessional instructor in the UVic School of Social Work.



There is a need to embrace a broader definition of public built infrastructure and to better understand how investments in social and community infrastructure complement and reinforce investments in traditional 'hard' infrastructure. **BY RUSSELL MAWBY, STEVE POMEROY, DUNCAN MACLENNAN, AND DAVID HAY**

Public Infrastructure for Tomorrow: A Case for Housing

INFRASTRUCTURE IS WHAT MAKES our cities and towns livable. It conveys broad public benefit and contributes to the viability of our neighbourhoods and municipalities. It can serve as a determinate in how equitable, inclusive, and sustainable our communities are.

Public infrastructure is by and large the "hard" built structures that we depend on in our daily lives. The early, and in most cases continuing, policy rationales for public investment in infrastructure were health and safety, notably, water quality, treatment, and distribution, and infrastructure related to police and fire services. A second early reason for public investment in infrastructure was to support commerce, specifically the movement of goods and workers.

Infrastructure has traditionally been understood to include, at the local level, roads, bridges, sewers, and water treatment and distribution systems. On a broader regional and national level it

has been understood to include rail and air transportation, and telecommunications networks. More recently, the view of infrastructure has expanded to include other built structures, such as community and recreational facilities, hospitals, schools, public spaces, social housing, and health centres—what has been called "social" infrastructure—all of which relate to the original premise of securing citizen health and safety.

All levels of government contributed to the building of Canada's public infrastructure in the post-war years through to the 1970's. Over the last twenty years, however, the focus has shifted to the development of knowledge-based "soft" infrastructure, including labour as human capital, and to a lesser extent its "social" component such as the networks of volunteers and individuals working in community-based agencies. While "soft" infrastructure also contributes to econom-

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

ic health and positive social outcomes, the lack of attention to our “hard” infrastructure in recent times is a serious omission because these policy areas can have key impacts on growth and productivity. They can shape the context and capacity of local responses to the global competitive challenge. This includes not only potholes, bridge closures, and water contamination that

“The view of infrastructure has expanded to include other built structures, such as community and recreational facilities, hospitals, schools, public spaces, social housing, and health centres—what has been called “social” infrastructure—all of which relate to the original premise of securing citizen health and safety.”

represent a breakdown of traditional built infrastructure, but also the losses of social built infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and affordable housing.

Housing is a key feature of social infrastructure

Housing differs from other forms of public built infrastructure because it is more generally provided by the market as a commodity, although that provision is shaped and controlled by public policies such as zoning, not to mention infrastructure investments such as roads and sewers. At the same time, basic shelter is fundamental to the health, safety, and well-being of residents and, accordingly, governments across all jurisdictions have at various times and to varying degrees directly invested in the provision of

housing. It is widely acknowledged in the advanced economies that for societies to be decently housed the state, either through direct investment, enabling, or income programs may have to support housing for poorer households. Housing is, in that sense at least, undeniably social infrastructure.

There are three main ways in which the extent, location, style, and delivery of housing infrastructure impacts the regional objectives of governments:

1. First, at the regional scale, the volume and location of housing provided will have significant effects on house prices, wealth, and mobility, as well as an impact on spatial compactness or sprawl.
2. Second, housing typically comprises roughly 70% of the built environment of urban centres and in that sense is a key element in shaping the social perceptions of the quality of places, as well as how inequalities within them are expressed and organized.
3. Finally and more recently, housing has been identified as a platform on which various health and social services can be delivered. This is most obvious in the health arena, where a strong trend exists in favour of community-based delivery, including tertiary psychiatric care in the community, independent supported living for aging seniors,

and community-based approaches to criminal justice. These examples require housing infrastructure in order to deliver specialized services. In short, housing infrastructure is as important to these health and support services as roads are to vehicular traffic.

Providing public infrastructure is justified on the basis that it generates a collective good that would not otherwise be achieved. For example, without public investment in road maintenance, home owners would need to build and maintain the road in front of their house themselves, a clearly inefficient approach to modern city building. By the same token, ensuring a sufficient and appropriate housing supply through various forms of public policy and investment contributes to a collective good in the form of a healthier and more productive society. Attention to and public investment in housing has direct benefits for other social outcomes, such as reducing the high cost of homelessness on the emergency response system. A consequence of a lack of access to housing is an inability to fully participate in the economy and society in general. Further, direct links between access to housing and performance in education, employment, and health outcomes are becoming better under-

“Just as traditional infrastructure facilitates the transport of goods and employees, housing provides a fundamental and necessary social infrastructure in the form of homes for workers and spaces for public and private action.”

stood. While most housing is privately provided and purchased, many cases exist where housing is publicly funded, or where public programs facilitate the private purchase of shelter.

Just as traditional infrastructure facilitates the transport of goods and employees, and also services homes and businesses, housing provides a fundamental and necessary social infrastructure

in the form of homes for workers and spaces for public and private action. The home one lives in is also a primary platform for community-based program delivery and successful achievement of other public policy objectives. Thus, the provision of housing is critical to the performance of the labour market and economy, and a key element of social infrastructure.

Public infrastructure in the new economy

In the industrial society, and especially in a historically resource-dominant economy like Canada's, development was based on some combination of the source of materials and access to major transportation arteries and markets. Early versions of infrastructure investment focused on moving both raw materials and finished products, and later, on creating jobs that attracted populations to specific locations.

continued on page 8

continued from page 7

“A traditional economic base theory has to be replaced by a more complex view of the world where infrastructure-related decisions can attract growth rather than simply follow it.”

The basis for economic growth in the post-industrial, knowledge-based era is fundamentally different. The manufacture and transport of goods has given way to the “manufacture” and communication of ideas and information. The critical resource today in many urban centres is a well-educated, connected, and knowledgeable labour force, one that is increasingly linked by high-speed communications networks. Plus, evidence suggests that the quality of places, including residential as well as public spaces, plays a key role in attracting and retaining skilled labour. Economic activity migrates to places that have a population that possesses these attributes. A traditional economic base theory, therefore, has to be replaced by a more complex view of the world where infrastructure-related decisions can attract growth rather than simply follow it.

Accordingly, investments in the fabric of communities that enhance quality of life and build the capacity and knowledge of the labour force have an increasingly significant impact on the economic prosperity and competitiveness of cities. This suggests that, in a post-industrial economy, investment should embrace cultural and social infrastructure—universities, theatres,

art galleries, recreational facilities, and parkland—institutions and elements that enhance livability and improve quality of life. At the same time, individuals and families need places to live at a cost within their means, an ever-increasing

challenge in today’s cities.

The Ottawa experiment

In order to advance a broader definition of public-built infrastructure in policy decisions, the City of Ottawa Housing Branch is coordinating a research project into the importance of investments in social infrastructure titled *Examining the Social Elements of Public Infrastructure: Impacts on Competitiveness and Implications for Governance*. The goal of the project is to develop and apply new infrastructure models that take into account how investment in social infrastructure, particularly housing, influences and contributes to the economic vitality and competitiveness of cities. ■

This article has been adapted from the Research Backgrounder prepared for the Examining the Social Elements of Public Infrastructure project. The project is financially supported by Infrastructure Canada’s Knowledge-Building, Outreach and Awareness Program. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.

For more information on the project visit:
www.city.ottawa.on.ca/city_services/housing/12_7_en.shtml



Smart Growth on the Ground is an innovative program to change the way that development is done in B.C.—by creating real, built examples of smart planning and building. **BY JODIE SIU**

Smart Growth on the Ground: Action-based, Meaningful Sustainability Planning

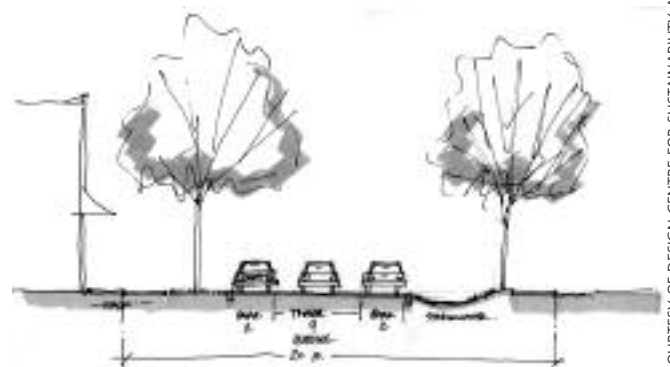
AS MORE PEOPLE MOVE to our province, we have an opportunity to manage the growth in ways that benefit the economy, environment, and society. Smart Growth on the Ground is helping real BC communities prepare for this challenge.

This innovative program helps communities plan for more sustainable, smarter growth. Smart Growth on the Ground (SGOG) is a partnership of the Design Centre for Sustainability at UBC, the Real Estate Institute of BC, and Smart Growth BC.

To date, Maple Ridge, Squamish, and the Oliver region have participated. In each community, SGOG helps create plans for land use (locating homes and jobs), transportation (figuring out how people and goods will move around), and urban design (making each community look and feel unique).

In each community the process is marked by:

- *Meaningful participation by citizens* – People have a real impact on the plans for their community
- *Cutting-edge research* – Participants are provid-



Thinking Green: A proposed street in Squamish drains water naturally.

COURTESY OF DESIGN CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY AT UBC

ed with research on key sustainability issues, and they are asked to consider issues that will impact their cities and towns in the future (like an aging population, rising fuel prices, and more)

- *An exciting design workshop* – An intense, four-day “charrette” event brings together people from diverse perspectives (including traditional adversaries), and helps them work together to plan for growth

continued on page 10

INFRASTRUCTURE

continued from page 9

- *A focus on action* – In each community, the SGOG helps get the results “on the ground”

By following this process, SGOG builds up three key kinds of infrastructure in each community—physical infrastructure, an infrastructure of research, and the infrastructure of effective citizen participation.

Physical infrastructure

The SGOG process is anchored by principles of sustainability. Future growth in a community must be accommodated in a way that respects and enhances the natural environment and local quality of life.

As a result, ideas of green infrastructure—buildings, roads, and overall development that works with nature—have taken hold in SGOG communities. In Maple Ridge, the local government is now encouraging developers to build

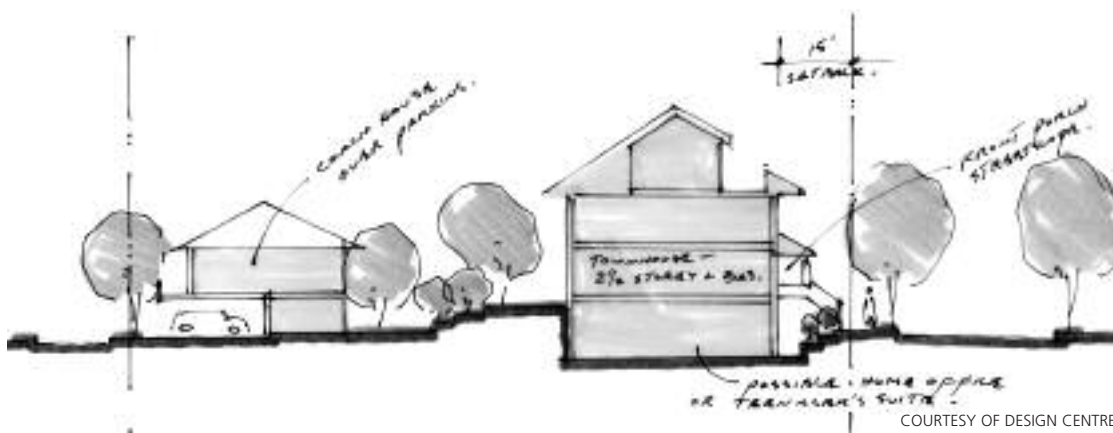
“green” buildings that use less water and energy. In Oliver, new road designs build on the local tradition of draining rainwater naturally.

Research infrastructure

Led by the Design Centre for Sustainability at the University of British Columbia (DCS), SGOG is setting up a framework of cutting-edge research on sustainable land use.

In each community, citizens tell the team what issues are important to them. DCS then creates or coordinates research on the topic. Among others, research was prepared on energy management in Maple Ridge, affordable housing in Squamish, and climate change and water resources in Oliver.

Each research issue is presented with its local implications, but communities throughout BC can use the results and recommendations.



COURTESY OF DESIGN CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY AT UBC

Smart, Sustainable Vision. New live-work townhouses in Maple Ridge will accommodate new residents and jobs.

Infrastructure for public participation

One of the key principles in SGOG is the idea that “everyone has a voice.” As a result of this principle, SGOG uses an inclusive process and a charrette.

The process begins with intense engagement of “stakeholders”—the residents, property owners, environmentalists, business owners and others who have a stake in the neighbourhood. These people all contribute to priority setting for research and design.

Next, the charrette involves the public and other stakeholders in the design itself. Representatives of the public join elected officials and municipal staff. Developers and key agencies are also at the table. All of these people work together to design the land use, transportation, and urban design plans for their communities. The SGOG team facilitates the process, but decisions are made by people who will live with the results.

The positive results from SGOG have inspired an ongoing framework for public participation. Meaningful and innovative public involvement is now accepted and expected in SGOG communities. For example, Squamish is preparing a Downtown Plan for their Official



Planning Together. Oliver citizens and officials work together at the charrette.

COURTESY OF DESIGN CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY AT UBC

Community Plan, and is insisting on a leading edge public process.

Looking ahead

The SGOG partners are currently helping Maple Ridge, Squamish and Oliver turn their plans into reality. And, now that SGOG has been underway for three years, SPARC BC has been retained to conduct an evaluation of the process. The SGOG team will use SPARC BC’s recommendations to refine the program, so that smart growth—and the infrastructure it creates—can be brought to even more B.C. communities. ■

To learn more about the Smart Growth on the Ground project, visit <www.sgog.bc.ca>.



Social aspects of infrastructure might appear to be unrelated to more common perceptions of physical infrastructure. However, as the following article shows, it is merely another way to view the inter-relatedness between community services, public works, and people's needs. **BY NYTHALAH BAKER**

(Re) Introducing Social Infrastructure

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT and environmental sustainability are being given greater attention in light of growing global markets and changes to Canadian commodity sectors. In light of these changes, the question arises as to how communities and various levels of government can continue to meet citizens' needs. For some, the question might be whether governments even have a role in addressing people's needs.

Social infrastructure:

The concept is not new, the phraseology is

When examining varied approaches to community growth and development, consideration is being given to the increasingly descriptive "infrastructure" phrase. The word "infrastructure" is no longer restricted to public works, and seems to help explain the varied systems that are needed for different sectors to operate. While "infrastructure" still evokes images of roads, highways, intersections, sewer lines, and water systems, the word is gaining wider application.

The phrase "social infrastructure" is fairly new

in Canadian circles. Used for decades in development work conducted in developing nations, the concept of social infrastructure has been primarily linked to education, health, and social development. Used sporadically in a Canadian context since the 1980s,¹ the phrase is being increasingly used in public and social policy lexicon to more accurately qualify social development concerns.

In reviewing the literature, social infrastructure has become a new way to conceptualize the system of operations that essentially work to assist people and contribute to the public good. In a paper outlining the benefits of social infrastructure investment for children and families, Hanvey states "[s]ocial infrastructure encompasses the inter-dependent mix of places and spaces,

¹ See Community Social Planning Council of Toronto. (2003). "Social infrastructure and vulnerable communities."

Toronto: Community Social Planning Council of Toronto; or Federation of Canadian Municipalities. (1998). "Statement on social infrastructure." Retrieved January 6, 2006, from <www.canadiansocialresearch.net/social.htm>

programs and networks at all levels.”² Another definition from *Public Policy and the Participation of Rural Nova Scotia Women in the New Economy*³ claims there are two essential aspects to the concept of social infrastructure: social support and income support. Social support includes a child-care system—not just childcare—and services provided by non-profit organizations. Income support includes an employment insurance system and social assistance or welfare.⁴ One of the more comprehensive and succinct explanations of social infrastructure that informs this article is from the County of Simcoe in Ontario:⁵

Social infrastructure or the system of social services, networks, and facilities that support people and healthy communities... [I]t means ensuring necessities like quality childcare, education, adequate income, shelter, safety, recreation, and cultural expression.

In essence, social infrastructure can be defined as systems that create the social safety net, social services, or the third sector. This often includes health, education, childcare, income support, affordable housing, child protection services, parks and recreation, libraries, and service clubs. Based on examples, definitions,

and applications of the phrase social infrastructure, the common thread involves a range of services to support people at all ages to facilitate inclusion or involvement in their community. From basic housing, food security, health, education, income security, and social and cultural well-being, these features appear to address daily essentials from quality of life concerns through a system of services and programs.

The system part is vital. That is why the word “infrastructure” is used. It more accurately articulates the responsive structure that is needed to adequately address basic needs and quality of life concerns. Ad hoc approaches to basic human and community social needs, like affordable housing, childcare, income support, health care, and relevant education and training options, are difficult to sustain. This is why greater attention needs to be given to establishing—or re-establishing—social infrastructure. If there is no system in place to support important programs and services, especially to address basic human needs of shelter, food, and security, how will we manage with disconnected parts?

continued on page 14

2 Hanvey, Louise. (2004). “Investing in social infrastructure in Canadian communities to benefit children and families.” Retrieved January 6, 2006, from <www.nationalchildrensalliance.com/nca/pubs/2004/socialinfrastructure.pdf>. p.2.

3 Manicom, Ann; Rhymes, Janet; Armour, Nan and Parsons, Doreen. (2005). *Public policy and the participation of rural Nova Scotia women in the new economy*. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada.

4 Ibid.

5 County of Simcoe. (2005). “Quality child care.” Retrieved January 6, 2006, from <www.county.simcoe.on.ca/whats-new/quality-child-care>

continued from page 13

Community development and social infrastructure

Similar to the four pillars of community development needed for holistic and sustainable development, economic, physical, and social infrastructures are inter-related components. Too frequently, however, social aspects of community survival have been absent from planning. The separation of social infrastructure results in losses for communities. While these losses may not be immediately visible, like potholes, road closures, or business closures are, there are significant ripple effects.

Despite the growing rates of people living near or below liveable incomes, governments' responses are noticeably delayed. Given the significant changes during the past few decades to social, health, and education program funding, increasing numbers of individuals and families are being affected by these policy changes. In 2002, Marcel Lauzière, then president of the Canadian Council on Social Development,⁶ spoke to this concern: “[j]ust as our physical infrastructure, our bridges and roads are crumbling, so too are the key pillars of our social infrastructure which are essential if our poor children are to have a fighting chance in life.”

Since 2002, social infrastructure is facing increased financial instability, especially services

and programs that assist people experiencing discrimination and isolation. This is in part due to the elimination of core funding and shift towards project-based service delivery models. While there is a need for innovative services and project accountability to ensure relevant programs are delivered, stability and continuity are important criteria to maintain social services. Presently there are growing numbers of equality seeking and advocacy non-profit organizations struggling to keep their doors open, despite the increasing numbers of people in need.

There are serious consequences if we avoid prioritizing social infrastructure spending. “Unlike its physical counterpart, *social infrastructure* takes much longer to rebuild once it has gone—and its impacts are more extensive.”⁷ Provincial and federal governments must recommit to adequate levels of funding for social infrastructure, otherwise the risk of more fragmented services and programs will leave even few structures standing. ■

Based on A Discussion Paper on Concepts and Practices of Social Infrastructure – An Application to Canadian Rural Partnership Dialogues and Status of Women Canada Projects in BC. Submitted to Status of Women Canada and the BC Rural Team (March 2006).

6 Canadian Council on Social Development. (November 4, 2002). “Communiqué: Child hunger increasing in Canada as gap widens between haves and have-nots, CCSD report concludes.” Retrieved February 10, 2006, from <www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2002/pcco2/pr.htm>

7 Reimer, Bill. (2005). “A rural perspective on linkages among communities.” Retrieved December 11, 2006, from <nre.concordia.ca/_ftp2004/reports/Linkages_Reimer%20-%20EN.pdf>. p. 5.



The neighbourhood is the functional unit of any town or city's sense of community. The design and planning of a neighbourhood—its infrastructure—is essential to its vitality. **BY WEIHSI HU**

The Infrastructure of Community: Building Better, Smarter Neighbourhoods

A RECENT DINNER CONVERSATION reminded me of my first day in Canada, nearly fifteen years ago. My conversation partner, recently arrived from England, remarked that he was having difficulty in adjusting to the Canadian sense of space and distance. “You have this huge house,” he described enthusiastically, “a large front yard, the sidewalk, a bit more grass, then a wide street, and then in reverse order, the bit of grass, the sidewalk, the large front yard, and finally your neighbour's house.”

That was also my first impression of Canada. Throughout the 45-minute car ride to our new house after arriving in the country, I was in awe. It was like a picture of Disneyland. The individually detached and beautifully designed houses with back and front yards, divided by fences, was something that I had only seen in pictures. The sense of order, cleanliness, and calm in the residential zone was jarringly different from the condensed neighbourhood in which I grew up in Taiwan.

Now, after spending an equal amount of time living in both countries, the differences in the way communities are built are even more apparent. In Taiwan, the warm organic way of building the sense of community made up for what was

lacking in order and calm. Growing up, everyone in my neighbourhood was an aunt or uncle. Rain or shine, I could play with other kids out on the same street where the adults worked and the families lived. There was always a sense of looking out for each other. If I forgot my keys and my parents weren't home, I would be invited to have snacks at my neighbours'. The park was the major public space for people to participate in many social and arts activities, but additionally, groups of adults could be seen having conversations on the street throughout the day. The outdoor space on the street was a public space for people to congregate and build relationships. I didn't have that sense living in Canada.

Our living space makes a big difference in the way we live. Changes in the urban planning concepts since the 1950s have changed the way communities are built. The standard for suburban development “has isolated people from their neighbors and their communities, detached people from their surroundings, and drained the sense of community.”¹ For this reason, the focus of community development moved away from neighbourhood development because geograph-

continued on page 16

continued from page 15

ic definition of a community has become less relevant in our societies today.

The recent renaissance of neighbourhood revitalization in community development brings us back to the idea of a geographic community.² In order to understand how to tackle neighborhood revitalization through a community development process, it is important to understand how the infrastructure of the neighbourhood can either contribute to or inhibit this process.

For neighborhood revitalization, the first step must be developing a sense of community. David McMillan and David Chavis have the most broadly validated and widely utilized psychological literature on the *sense of community* theoretic foundation. McMillan and Chavis propose that *sense of community* is “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.”³ This defini-

tion translates into four building blocks in developing the *sense of community*—membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs.⁴ These elements build on the ideas of trust, shared emotional connections, inclusion, and cohesiveness. They are related interactions based on a consensus process where both sides have sufficient inputs. Physical presence in the neighbourhood, getting out of the gated yard, and seeing the faces of the individuals that live in the neighbourhood are the necessary interactions required to build a *sense of community*.

Some will argue that our increasingly modern society enjoys the freedom associated with autonomy, rootlessness, and privacy. The self-defined individualist society helped break away from the old limiting sense of community, because “the old-style communities were often homogeneous, suspicious of outsiders, socially and economically stratified, emotionally stifling, and limited in opportunities for personal and

“For neighborhood revitalization, the first step must be developing a sense of community.”

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- 1 Lund, Hollie. (2002). “Pedestrian Environments and Sense of Community.” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (21). 301-312.
 - 2 Recent initiatives such as the Action for Neighbourhood Change Project, a learning initiative in neighbourhood revitalization funded by Canadian federal government <www.anccommunity.ca> and many others can be found through online searches.
 - 3 McMillan, David W. and Chavis, David M. (1986). “Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory.” *Journal of Community Psychology* (14). 6-22.
 - 4 Ibid.
 - 5 Shaffer, Carolyn R. & Anundsen, Kristin. (1993). *Creating Community Anywhere: Finding Support and Connection in a Fragmented World*. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons Press. 6.

professional development.”⁵ This type of community does not promote inclusion of diversity, and is in many ways stifling. Because of this, we have moved beyond the definition of geographic communities to interests-based communities. But with every gain there is a loss; many advantages, like shared security, disappear in suburban sprawl. Neighbourhood revitalization can help decrease the isolation of individuals, and help promote an organic and natural community development process, without, perhaps, sacrificing the individualist autonomy we enjoy.

Some of the propositions for using urban planning and architectural design to promote a sense of community come from the New Urbanism movement started in the 1980s. This movement, inspired by Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford, is a reaction to urban sprawl. The resurgence of the urbanism movement has been given many other names, including “smart growth” and “ecodensity” in B.C. The principles are all similar at heart, with the basic design principle being a walkable neighbourhood. A walkable neighbourhood is more than pedestrian-friendly, it encourages a pedestrian-oriented lifestyle which translates into various areas of urban design. In housing design, it means a higher density and greater diversity of housing to accommodate various socio-economic needs. In urban planning, it includes mixed zoning to allow a concentrated core of retail and employ-

ment within a five-minute walk. It also includes dedicated public spaces, narrower streets shaded by rows of trees to slow traffic, and connected street networks to disperse traffic and encourage pedestrians. Finally, social infrastructure, like

“A walkable neighbourhood is more than pedestrian-friendly, it encourages a pedestrian-oriented lifestyle.”

schools, should be close-by to allow easy access.⁶

From my personal experience in Taiwan, although not as modern in design, my neighbourhood fitted the concept of new urbanism, and its sense of community was strong. The narrow streets and the second floor overhangs created a public walkway friendly to pedestrians in all weather. The mixed-use buildings allowed most people live where they work. A nearby park and shops within walking distance helped create interactions between neighbours.

In short, the effort to build neighbourhood infrastructure needs to recognize the importance of urban design and the implicit principles that can support community building. City planners and architects are key partners in this work because they can help change the face of the neighbourhood. In the mean time, recognizing the physical barriers to a sense of community can allow us to invest in bridging the gaps and build a better sense of community. ■

⁶ Lund (2002) and also see Smart Growth BC <www.smartgrowth.bc.ca>

On-Street Parking for People with Disabilities

Sufficient on-street parking for people with disabilities is another step in making Vancouver a more 'livable' and 'inclusive' city, writes **Doug Louie**, Parking Management Engineer at the City of Vancouver.

THE CITY OF VANCOUVER has an active program to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, including regulations to ensure that adequate special parking spaces are provided. In 1972, Vancouver City Council implemented provisions for persons with disabilities in the Building By-law, the first municipality in Canada to do so. Similarly, under the Parking By-law which dictates parking space requirements in buildings, new developments are required to provide parking spaces for persons with disabilities. The Parking By-law specifies the size, location and number of spaces required. In general, between two and ten percent of the total parking spaces provided in a new development must be designated for people with disabilities, depending upon the specific use and size of the development. Both the Building By-law and the Parking By-law are updated on a regular basis. Most recently in 2001, Council reviewed and increased off-street disability parking space requirements within the Parking By-law.

To further improve access for people with disabilities, Vancouver's on-street parking policies were reviewed. Vancouver already has a parking meter exemption decal program which grants those who cannot operate a parking meter, free access to metered parking. However, only a few on-street spaces have been specifically designat-

ed for people with disabilities, three of which are metered spaces within the downtown area.

City staff, with the help of a consultant, reviewed Vancouver's on-street disability parking needs. This included a review of literature for best practices and applicable regulations, and a review of practices of comparable cities. In North America, no consistent approach to the provision of on-street disability parking spaces was found. In the United States, guidelines were recently developed for discussion as part of the American Disability Act. In Canada, there are no guidelines or regulations and each city has had to determine its own provisions. It was clear from the experiences of other cities, where there was no general pattern of approach, that any on-street parking provisions in Vancouver must be customized to the local Vancouver parking conditions. Based on the review, changes to the provision of on-street disability parking in residential and commercial areas were recommended as described below.

Residential Areas

In residential areas with very high demands for on-street parking, residents or visitors with a disability can have difficulties finding an appropriate on-street parking space that is both accessible and convenient. In residential areas with resi-

dent parking regulations, it is recommended that a vehicle displaying an authorized disability placard be given a three-hour exemption from all resident parking zones. This will allow visitors with disabilities to park on the street as close as possible to his or her destination in a resident parking zone.

To assist residents with disabilities in residential areas that have very high parking pressures, it is recommended that special on-street disability parking spaces be designated. These areas may or may not have resident parking controls already in place. If resident parking controls are not in place, then the spaces created could serve either visitors or residents with disabilities. The residential areas identified for installation of these spaces include:

- Kerrisdale multiple dwelling area
- West End
- South Granville multiple dwelling area

It is anticipated that approximately 50 designated spaces would be initially installed in the residential areas identified above, representing roughly 2% of the total on-street parking spaces.

Commercial Areas

In many commercial areas it may be difficult to find on-street parking spaces despite the presence of time limits or parking meters due to very high demands for parking. For people with disabilities, this is even more problematic if there is

NEW VANCOUVER PARKING REGULATIONS

- **A vehicle displaying an authorized disability placard has a three-hour exemption from all resident parking zones.**
- **75 metered spaces designated for persons with disability will be installed in high-use commercial areas.**
- **Vehicles displaying an authorized disability placard are permitted to stop in passenger zones, general (non-commercial) loading zones, and no parking zones for up to 30 minutes for active loading or unloading of passengers or materials.**

no off-street parking alternative that is in close proximity to their destination. To improve accessibility to these commercial areas, it is recommended that on-street parking spaces be designated for vehicles displaying an authorized disability placard. In most cases these are in metered areas and therefore specially designated metered parking spaces for people with disabilities will be created. The commercial areas identified for installation of these meters include:

- Downtown Business District
- Central Broadway
- Yaletown
- Chinatown
- Kerrisdale
- Commercial Drive
- Kitsilano

It is anticipated that approximately 75 metered spaces designated for persons with disability will

continued on page 20

continued from page 19

be initially installed in the commercial areas identified above. It will represent roughly 2% of the total on-street parking supply in those areas. If there is a need for additional on-street disability parking spaces in other commercial areas, these will also be reviewed by staff and installed on a case-by-case basis as required.

To further assist people with disabilities, it is recommended that vehicles displaying an authorized disability placard be permitted to stop in passenger zones, general (non-commercial) loading zones, and no parking zones for up to 30 minutes for active loading or unloading of passengers or materials. Currently there is a 3 – 5 minute maximum for all vehicles in these zones for active loading and unloading. The extension of the time limit recognizes the fact that people with disabilities may require more time to load and unload from a vehicle.

On June 13, 2006, Vancouver City Council

approved the above recommendations. On July 18, 2006, the necessary changes to the Street and Traffic By-Law were completed and the new parking exemptions for vehicles displaying an authorized disability placard were put into effect. Currently, the initial implementation of designated on-street parking spaces for people with disabilities in areas with high parking demands is underway and should be completed in 2007.

The above initiatives support Vancouver’s goal to be a “livable” and “inclusive” city for all citizens, regardless of their differences including physical abilities, language, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. It strengthens the City’s measures to enhance the accessibility of the City to persons with disabilities. It also recognizes that Vancouver has an aging population, and there will be an increasing need to ensure the City properly accommodates residents with mobility challenges. ■



Parking Permit Program for People with Disabilities

SPARC BC’s Parking Permit Program:

- Issues parking permits for people with mobility impairments
- Conducts public education on the importance of accessible communities
- Provides resources for enhancing accessibility

PHONE (604) 718-7744

9:00 AM to 4:30 PM

EMAIL permits@sparc.bc.ca

ADDRESS

201 – 221 East 10th Ave., Vancouver, BC

Open Monday – Friday

9:00 AM to 4:30 PM

Closed Saturday and Sunday

SPARC BC has advocated for the rights of people with mobility impairments since 1969.

Learning Initiatives for Rural and Northern BC

Maureen LeBourdais, coordinator of the BC Rural Network and LIRN BC partner, tells us about a new community development program.

LEARNING INITIATIVES FOR RURAL and Northern BC, or LIRN BC, is a program offered through a partnership of government and non-government organizations to collaborate with rural and Northern B.C. communities in the development and delivery of learning initiatives that build on community capacities.

LIRN BC came about as a result of a session held at the fourth Annual BC Rural Summit in Osoyoos in April 2006. Representatives of agencies and organizations shared information about their respective mandates to deliver dialogues and workshops in rural communities around B.C. Recognizing that repetition and duplication of events puts a burden on local community capacity, four organizations pooled their resources to deliver a series of fifteen “learning events:” Social Planning and Research Council of BC (Community Development Education Program), BC Rural Network, BC Rural Team (Canadian Rural Partnership), and New Horizons for Seniors (Service Canada). These partners have combined their expertise and resources in an effort to maximize community capacity building opportunities for people living in rural, remote, and Northern regions of the province.

Thirty-seven rural communities and organizations responded to the LIRN BC Call for Expression of Interest. Using a framework for assessing and rating, the LIRN BC partners

ranked each EOI according to community location, organizational profile, and community support. The partners chose communities that demonstrated the most need for LIRN BC’s assistance, or which were in regions of the province that have less access to community development programs. LIRN BC events to date have been delivered in the form of workshops, information sessions and dialogues and have covered a wide range of community needs and interests. The content and design of each event is developed in collaboration with a local partner. Thus far, we have observed several common themes of interest across BC communities: sustainable community planning, inter-community relationship-building, social issues such as affordable housing, poverty, addictions, as well as demographics such as youth and seniors.

Communities participating in LIRN BC have expressed an overwhelmingly positive response to questions about the value of this initiative. As such, LIRN BC is planning another expanded round of learning events for the next fiscal year. Several other organizations have expressed interest in joining the partnership. ■

A planning and information session will take place at the BC Rural Network AGM and Workshop held in Smithers on March 1 & 2, 2007. For more information, email cde@sparc.bc.ca.

The Second BC/Yukon Aboriginal Forum on Homelessness Research

The Forum brought together well over one hundred participants from across BC and the Yukon to discuss the future of research and action on Aboriginal homelessness, writes **Frances Tang-Graham**.

THE NATIVE EDUCATION CENTRE and SPARC BC organized the Second BC/Yukon Aboriginal Forum on Homelessness Research held at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre on November 6, 2006. The conference brought together nearly 150 grass-roots activists, service providers, and funders from across B.C. and the Yukon to look at the opportunities and challenges involved in researching Aboriginal homelessness.

The participants explored many difficult questions. As expected, many participants voiced considerable mistrust of traditional research methods, which they saw as exploitative and unproductive. While some attendees agreed that community-based participatory methods offer some hope for the future, there was also a general call for “more action, less talk.” Others expressed concern that that research was still too indirect a way of tackling the problem of Aboriginal homelessness.

“It’s about action,” said Cheryl Matthew, Executive Director of the Centre for Native Policy and Research. “There’s no point in doing

research if we’re not going to do something about it.”

Janice Abbott, Executive Director of Atira Women’s Resource Society, argued that the money currently spent on research would have a greater impact if it was spent on new housing and programs. “One research project I’d be happily involved in is a research project that studied why politicians continue to deny the problems that exist in our communities,” she said.

Rod McCormick, an associate professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at UBC, was a little more optimistic. In a pre-forum keynote address, McCormick noted that increasing numbers of Aboriginal researchers are graduating from universities. “We’re seeing research being done by us instead of on us or with us. I think that’s a slow evolution.”

The statistical tools of research, such as the census, continue to fuel decision making at all levels—and this is not changing. “Without participating in it, you don’t have representation, and without representation you don’t have inclusion,” said John Makson, a policy analyst at the

“It’s about action. There’s no point in doing research if we’re not going to do something about it.”

—Cheryl Matthew



PHOTO FRANCES TANG-GRAHAM

Reporting Out. Rain Daniels facilitates a discussion during the closing plenary at the second BC/Yukon Aboriginal Forum on Homelessness Research.

First Nations Statistical Institute. He explained that if homeless populations were adequately captured in the census, more funding and programs would be allocated to address the issue. “Used in the right context, statistics can be a powerful tool for social change.”

As the one-day forum progressed it became apparent that a great deal of healing was needed to help redress the inter-generational trauma imposed by Canada’s colonial policies. Small group discussions focused on a variety of issues, including the impact of residential schools, youth, women, Northern communities, healing and wellness, and participatory research models.

Participants noted that a tendency exists to fixate on the negative aspects of Aboriginal life, without acknowledging the immense strength

and richness of Aboriginal culture. In addition, many attendees expressed the belief that homelessness could only be addressed through a long-term, collaborative process, one which could only be built on a foundation of trust.

The organizers hope that forum was only a first step in this process. Based on the conference goals and the information gathered at the event, a series of workshops and “kitchen table” discussions will help communities to follow up on a sustainable local level. Research guidebooks are also in development that will help communities take ownership of and regulate the research process. The intention of these steps is to ensure that research actually benefits communities and that knowledge does not lead to an imbalance of power. ■

Promoting Social Inclusion in Your Organization

The challenges and rewards of social inclusion can be great. Presented here are some tips for integrating social inclusion into your organization.

CREATING A WELCOMING environment for all community members is a challenge we face as community planners. Because there are many aspects to identity and because social exclusion can relate to a wide range of barriers, developing strategies to support full participation for all can be difficult. A definition of social inclusion that summarizes the many complex issues in building inclusive environments comes from the Edmonton Social Planning Council:

“Social inclusion is described as a feeling of belonging, acceptance and recognition, and is intertwined with issues of diversity, equality, opportunity and democratic participation. Inclusiveness is linked with social health and quality of life, and this in turn is linked with economic prosperity.”

Social inclusion is both a process and an outcome. As a process, we recognize that principles of inclusion must become integrated into our organizational and decision-making structure and that we must work to build an understanding at all levels of the organization. As soon as one challenge is met, we should expect that other opportunities and challenges will present themselves. At the same time, organizations that wish to incorporate a social inclusion perspective need to link that commitment to clearly defined outcomes for improved inclusion, supported by adequate resources.

Developing a plan for building social inclusion through processes and outcomes is an important part of making organizational change. Here are some useful steps for developing a successful approach to social inclusion:

- **Understand the issues.** It is important to educate about the wide range of barriers that contribute to social exclusion. You may wish to talk with other organizations in order to build connections as well as understanding.
- **Build recognition of the need for change.** It follows that education and understanding needs to be shared throughout all levels of the organization.
- **Make the organizational commitment.** This needs to be done at the governance and operational levels and needs to have the appropriate resources assigned to ensure success.
- **Develop a plan for achievable results.** Long-term change needs to have steps in order to observe and celebrate progress. The action plan can be used to demonstrate change within the organization and your community.
- **Assess and celebrate.** Ongoing assessment and evaluation of your change efforts is important because it can guide strategic directions and future activities. Remember that the elements of celebration, such as food, music, and storytelling, are also essential elements of inclusion. ■

Most Recent Stats: B.C. Has the Worst Child Poverty Rate in Canada

Too many children in Canada live in poverty. For the third year in a row, B.C. has the ignoble distinction of having the worst child poverty rate in Canada. By **Rebecca Siggner**.

THE MOST RECENT STATISTICS ON CANADIAN child poverty reveals that B.C. had the highest child poverty rates in Canada in 2004. Although the B.C. child poverty rate decreased by half a percentage from 24.1% in 2003 to 23.5% in 2004, B.C. still had the highest rate in the country for the third year in a row. Of the 1,195,805 children living in poverty in Canada, 196,080 of them live in B.C. The number of children living in poverty in B.C. is equivalent to the population of Nanaimo, Kelowna and Williams Lake combined.

This discomfiting news was released in Campaign 2000's annual Child Poverty Report Card. B.C.'s report card consists of nine fact sheets, comparing B.C.'s child poverty rates over time to the rest of the country. The report card includes some recommendations around what the provincial and federal governments can do to address child poverty. The poverty rates were calculated by Statistics Canada using its low income cut-offs (LICO) after government transfer payments, but before federal and provincial income taxes.

Why are B.C.'s families with children falling behind?

The incomes of B.C. families with children on welfare fell to a 16-year low in 2005, according to the National Council on Welfare, forcing income assistance claimants to live well below the poverty line. The purchasing power of income assistance rates has decreased drastically as inflation

has increased. A single parent with one child on welfare in B.C. had a total income of \$13,948, which is \$11,919 below the poverty line in 2004. A couple with two children on welfare has

an income that falls \$20,144 below the poverty line.

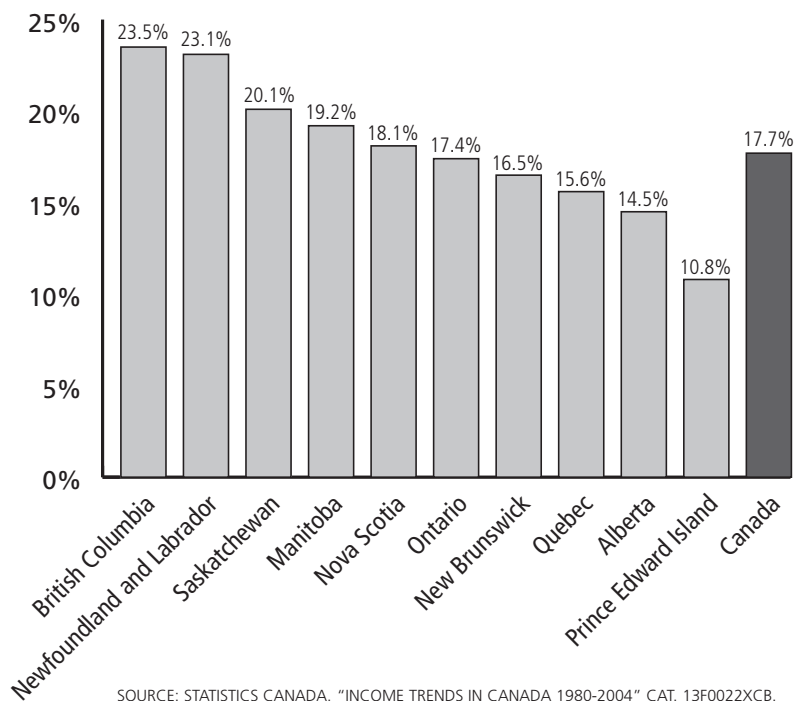
Paid work is often the first line of defense against poverty, but only if the jobs are good. For instance, 67.6% of poor children in B.C. live in families with some earned income. In 2004, the poverty rate for families with children in B.C. with no full-time worker was 44.5%. However, even 11.4% families with children with a full-time, full-year worker could not make ends meet. This means that the minimum wage in

continued on page 26

"Of the 1,195,805 children living in poverty in Canada, 196,080 of them live in B.C."

continued from page 25

FIGURE 1. **Child Poverty Rates in Canada (before tax), 2004**



B.C. is inadequate to bring B.C.’s families up to the poverty line.

Another contributor to the high child poverty rates in B.C. is the ineffectiveness of government transfers from the B.C. government. B.C. had the worst record in Canada when it came to reducing market poverty with government help. While B.C.’s transfers only lower the family market poverty rate from 28.6% to 21.6%, Newfoundland reduces its family market poverty rate from 37.9% to 20.3% with its government transfers.

With the purchasing power of income assistance eroding with inflation and the proliferation

of jobs with inadequate wages, income inequality is deepening in B.C. While incomes for the poorest people in B.C. have been stagnant since 1993, the richest have experienced a significant increase in average income. The poorest 10% of B.C. families with children earned an average of \$14,475 (constant 2004 dollars) in 2004 and the richest 10% earned an average of \$211,195. Despite continued economic growth, poor families have seen almost no real improvement in their situation. The relative income ratio between the top 10% and the bottom 10% in B.C. was 10 to 1 in 1993, but that ratio increased to 15 to 1 in 2004. This just goes to show that a rising tide does not raise all boats, nor does everyone benefit from a growing economy.

Both the Federal and B.C. governments need to develop a poverty reduction strategy with credible targets and timetables.

The provincial government needs to:

1. DEVELOP ACTIONS TO CREATE GOOD JOBS WITH DECENT WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS.

- Increase the minimum wage to \$10/hour.
- Eliminate the \$6/hour training wage.
- Increase the minimum call-out from two to four hours.
- Repeal legislation (Bill 37) that reduced the work start age from 15 to 12.

2. PROVIDE REASONABLE AND REALISTIC INCOME SUPPORT TO PEOPLE ON WELFARE.

- Raise the welfare rates by 50%.
- Index welfare rates to inflation.

3. DEVELOP A CHILD CARE PLAN.

- Pass legislation that commits B.C. to building a quality, accessible, publicly funded child care system.
- Shift the burden of the cost of child care from user fees to public funding.

The federal government needs to:

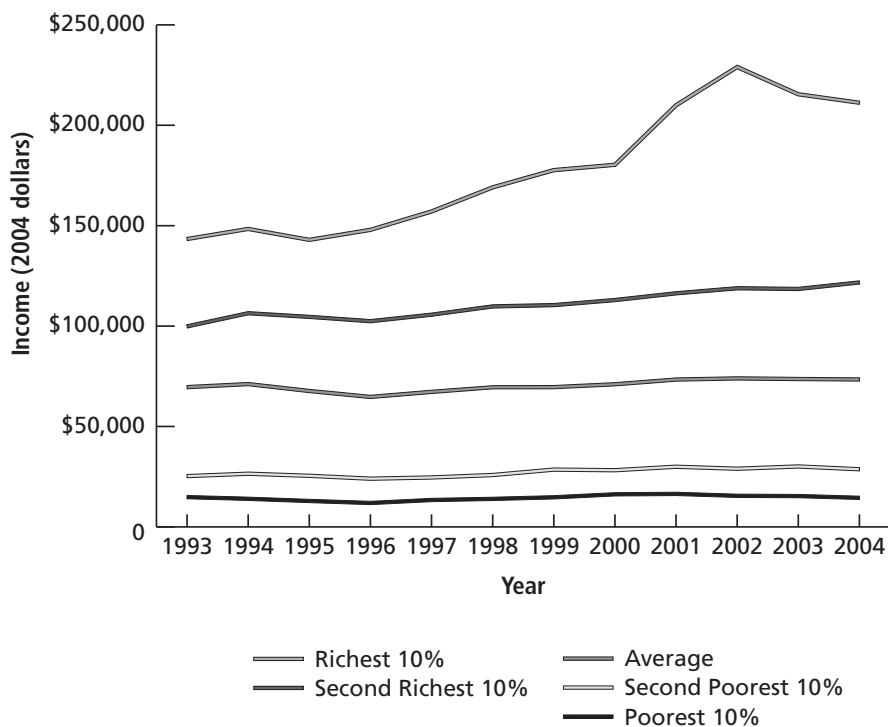
4. FURTHER INCOME SECURITY THROUGH AN ENHANCED CHILD TAX BENEFIT.

- Develop a multi-year plan with targets and timetables to consolidate the Canada Child Tax Benefit into a single program that provides a maximum of \$5,000 per child per year.
- End the “clawback” of National Child Benefit funds from families on social assistance in B.C.

5. PUT IN PLACE A PAN-CANADIAN SYSTEM OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE.

- Enact federal child care legislation.
- Use designated federal funds to develop and sustain quality, universal, affordable, inclusive regulated and licensed child care.

FIGURE 2. Total Annual Income for Families with Children in BC (Constant 2004 dollars): 1993–2004



SOURCE: CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, BASED STATISTICS CANADA'S MICRO DATA FILES.

6. CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE CANADIAN HOUSING STRATEGY.

- Increase annual federal funding of \$625 million per year.
- Develop a minimum of 25,000 affordable units across Canada annually.

7. INCREASE AND STABILIZE FUNDING OF THE CANADA SOCIAL TRANSFER.

- Establish enforceable principles that ensure adequate support is available to those in need.
- Increase federal funds for social services and social assistance. ■

The BC Community Accessibility Network Continues to Grow

BC CAN continues to bring individuals and organizations in the disability and accessibility field together to build knowledge and forge partnerships, writes **Nick Istvanffy**.

ACCESSIBILITY IS A SIGNIFICANT CONCERN for all British Columbians—a fact the latest BC CAN meeting confirmed. On September 28, over thirty individuals and representatives of disability serving organizations and community groups attended the third BC CAN regional meeting to discuss ideas, issues and options for improving the accessibility of our communities.

Participants discussed the findings of the *Access Links 2006–07* research and booklet, then moved on to explore accessibility issues and concerns in their communities. Topics included the meaning of accessibility and barrier-free participation in community life, the importance of accessible transportation, and the challenges related to ensuring accessible housing is available for persons with disabilities.

Workshop discussion also explored options for the future of the BC Community Accessibility Network. Participants in all of the BC CAN meetings have been enthusiastic about the potential of the network. The website of the network has the potential to act as a communications hub and information resource for accessibility oriented groups and communities. The network may also expand to include more disability serving organizations, to explore alternative ways to share information, and potentially to

help form a unified voice in addressing disability policy issues in British Columbia.

The popularity of the meetings and the sheer energy and commitment of the participants affirmed that accessibility is an urgent, pressing issue in British Columbia. At least one in seven British Columbians has some kind of disability, and the total will increase dramatically as the population ages. Participants affirmed that our communities need to become more accessible quickly, and should be fully accessible for all citizens and visitors. Meeting participants identified the 2010 Olympics as a valuable opportunity for to promote community accessibility.

The BC CAN Newsletter is one of the key tools in building participation and support for the network. The most recent newsletter, released in early November, touched on a range of important accessibility and disability related topics. These included the UN Treaty on the Rights of People with Disabilities, an expansion in the number of parking spaces for persons with disabilities in the City of Vancouver, and a mention of the recent SPARC BC Policy Spotlight on the options for accessibility legislation. *The BC CAN Newsletter* is issued bi-monthly, and anyone who is interested in receiving it should send an email to bccan@sparc.bc.ca. ■

Regional Forum on Vancouver Island

Community members from across Vancouver Island gathered at Providence Farm near Duncan in November for a one-day forum entitled “Connecting the Dots: Enhancing our Capacity for Healthy Communities on Vancouver Island.” The event, jointly sponsored by SPARC BC and BC Healthy Communities, attracted over sixty participants.

The day included presentations on the BC Healthy Communities approach as well as workshops on a variety of topics including integrated

capacity building, working with municipal governments, and collaborative leadership. An afternoon session utilized a Conversation Café model to support participants in generating new ideas and perspectives on issues facing their communities.

Further forums of this type are being planned in the New Year for the Vancouver Coastal Health Region and the Fraser Health Region. Contact gtong@sparc.bc.ca if you wish to learn more details about these upcoming events. ■

CSPN BC Focuses on the Municipal Roles in Supporting Social Planning

CSPN BC held its annual strategic planning steering meeting in November. Steering Committee members developed a strategic plan emphasizing the role that municipal governments play in social planning. Upcoming activities include:

- Regional forums in Vancouver Coastal and Fraser health regions as well as a regional conference for social planning organizations in the North and Interior health regions.
- A motion calling on the provincial government to provide funding for local social planning initiatives for presentation to the UBCM convention in Fall 2007.
- A provincial social planning forum for the spring of 2008 to support local social planning organizations in getting social planning on the agenda for the next round of municipal elections.



The CSPN BC Team (L–R): Steering Committee members, Nancy Henderson (SPARC BC), Cheryl McKeever (Community Development Society, Tri-Cities), Lynn Florey (Prince George Community Planning Council), Bunny Shannon (Comox Valley Social Planning Council), Rona Parks (Castlegar and District Community Services) and CSPN Administrators, Frances Tang-Graham and Jim Sands (SPARC BC).

Denied Assistance: Closing the Front Door on Welfare in B.C.

The story of the dramatic welfare caseload reduction in B.C. is far from the ‘feel good’ tale the Ministry likes to tell, writes researcher **Bruce Wallace**.

DO WE REALLY KNOW if helping far fewer people is helping in B.C.? Since the introduction of significant policy changes in 2002, B.C. has seen unparalleled reductions in the number of people receiving welfare. However, the government has no idea what happens to the thousands of people no longer accessing benefits. It has no measures in place to monitor or evaluate the impacts of its policies and practices.

As the caseload dropped the government’s narrative was that “this is good news” and “our approach is working”. They claimed that the welfare caseload was being reduced because more people were being moved from welfare to work—or in their words, from “dependency” to “employment and self sufficiency”.

This year VIPIRG and the CCPA contested this claim in their research report *Denied Assistance: Closing the Front Door on Welfare in BC*. Caseload information was accessed through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, which revealed the role welfare entry and exits played in the overall caseload dynamics. This statistical evidence was combined with 42 in-depth interviews conducted in Vancouver and Victoria with individuals seeking welfare, community workers and advocates as well as Ministry workers.

This research found that the substantial case-

load reduction in B.C. is primarily a “front-door” story and not due to more people exiting welfare as the government claims. The report demonstrates how British Columbia’s welfare application system is not working—it discourages, delays, and denies people who need help. Among the study’s key findings:

- B.C.’s welfare eligibility rules and the application process have become so onerous and complicated to navigate that they are systematically excluding some of the very people most in need of help. Many of them are not employable. Too often, the more vulnerable the person is—such as those with mental health issues or addictions—the more difficulty they have accessing the system.
- Some people are being “diverted to employment” (as the government presumes). But too many are instead being diverted to homelessness, charities, survival sex, and desperation. Some live on virtually no income. The truth of this is evident on the streets to anyone with eyes to see, and is supported by other studies into rising homelessness.
- People in need who are eligible for welfare are frequently unable to get it without the help of a knowledgeable advocate (and funding cuts mean there are fewer of such people, just as

the need has grown).

The response to the study from Minister Claude Richmond has been dismissive or inappropriate. In fact, since the sweeping changes to welfare were introduced five years ago, the Ministry has consistently ignored external evidence pointing to systematic harm.

The Ministry repeats its “good news” rhetoric despite the alarms raised by groups such as, VIPIRG, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC), the BC Association of Social Workers, the Dieticians of Canada, First Call, Victoria’s Community Social Planning Council, and Faith in Action Coalition. Concerns have also been raised through two separate investigations into the Ministry’s actions; one by the provincial Ombudsman’s office and another by the Auditor General’s office.

At the same time, the Ministry still has not fulfilled its accountability reporting obligations, or intentions, to measure client outcomes. The government makes the repeated claim of success—that they are fulfilling the mandate of moving people from welfare dependency to employment and increased self-sufficiency—however the Ministry does not actually collect the evidence to be able to make this critical claim.

Caseload reduction cannot be the primary measure of success for the welfare system in B.C. We do not need to end welfare, we need to end poverty. It is obviously time for the public

engage in envisioning an effective safety net in B.C. The public is increasingly concerned about the elevated visibility of homelessness and poverty resulting in a lack of public support for the current system.

Now, five years after the last politician-driven welfare reforms, it is time for the public to get

“B.C.’s welfare eligibility rules and the application process have become so onerous and complicated to navigate that they are systemically excluding some of the very people most in need of help.”

involved in the debate. Although research such as *Denied Assistance* is important in challenging government lies, minor reforms to prop up an archaic and punitive welfare system will neither significantly reduce poverty and inequality, nor promote social inclusion and healthy communities. It is time for the public to get engaged in substantive and radical change that creates programs that work in the best interest of those who need it and which have public confidence and support. ■

Denied Assistance: Closing the Front Door on Welfare in BC was written by Bruce Wallace, Seth Klein, and Marge Reitsma-Street. The report is a collaboration between the Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. For more information visit <www.vipirg.ca> or download the report at <www.policyalternatives.ca>.

A Social Work Student's Practicum Experience and Emerging Vision of Community Practice

By **Ramona Schucroft**

MY NAME IS RAMONA SCHUCROFT. This December, I will be graduating with a Bachelor of Social Work from the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria. For the last three months, I have had the pleasure of completing my fourth-year practicum at SPARC BC. I knew that I was interested in community development, but I didn't have a solid understanding of what this huge umbrella term truly meant. I was hoping that SPARC BC would provide some answers.

I was determined to complete my final practicum at SPARC BC not only because of the organization's exceptional work, but also because I knew that I could learn more about community development, which would prepare me for my role as a community social worker.

To begin, I am a young, immigrant woman of colour. My family and I immigrated to Canada fifteen years ago to escape civil war in Sri Lanka. After coming to Canada, I knew that I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to effect change in people's lives and also throughout the world. I guess I was always a dreamer. My dream and vision for a world reigned by social justice found a suitable home in social work.

Amidst social work discourse, the terms *community work*, *community development*, and *community worker* managed to capture my attention. I realized that being a community worker

required a transformation in the way I thought about how our society operated. It became evident that a government model for service provision needed to be supplemented with a community model, where people are the central forces of change and decision-making. Being a community worker means that I must work alongside other community members to realize the collective vision of the community. Within this model, all people are equal; therefore, empowerment is no longer an abstract term, but a reality that does not have to be handed down from the "expert social worker." Instead, we are all citizens of a community, working together for the collective well-being of all. This means that everyday people, people like you and me, join together to effect change by raising our voices together in the political arena to advocate for ourselves and find ways to address the needs that are prevalent in our communities.

Throughout my practicum, I had regular reminders that no single definition for community work or community development exists. I learned to define community development as it relates to my life experiences. Therefore, community development to me means that people come together to plan and discuss their needs, take actions to realize these plans, advocate so that their plans and needs are heard, and use the assets in the community to strengthen and unify

all people.

My work at SPARC BC was housed in the Community Development Education (CDE) Program, under the supervision of SPARC BC Researcher, Scott Graham. I developed two guidebooks for the CDE program: *Community Social Planning: A Guide for Collaboration, Organizational Development, Engagement, and Reflection*, and *A Methodology Guide for Creating a Social Plan*. Finding ways to include people has always been very important to me as a person and consequently for my practice. In these guidebooks, I was encouraged to write about the importance of inclusion and reasons as to why people are oppressed, and therefore excluded, in social and community initiatives. I was challenged around methods of including “hard to reach people.” After all, the history of community development deliberately excluded people, often in the name of progress, and has only recently committed itself to building and promoting inclusive communities. Without addressing the structural, institutional, and historical racism and oppression that are still prevalent in our communities, how can we move forward?

This practicum experience has solidified my goal of being a community social worker. Even though the definition of “community social worker” will take on several meanings throughout my social work career, I am committed to finding ways to improve our communities through community development initiatives, so that one day, we can all live in a society where

inclusion and respect for diversity are the norms.

I have realized that I am not just a community worker, but a citizen of a community. Therefore, I have a responsibility to work towards improving communities and community members’ lives—especially those who are marginalized. As an immigrant woman of colour, my place of otherness in society has to be acknowledged. But it is through this place that I find my strength and motivation to push bound-

“I realized that being a community worker required a transformation in the way I thought about how our society operated.”

aries so that all people can reach their personal best. Most importantly, I have learned that my vision for community development surpasses local boundaries and spreads across the world in hopes of unifying all people, regardless of race, class, religion, and colour. I am not afraid to be called a dreamer or state my visions boldly, for as Jim Ife cleverly writes “[i]f we are to change the world we must be able to say, with Martin Luther King, ‘I have a dream,’ and we must seek to share our vision of a better world.”¹ ■

¹ Ife, J. (2002). *Community development: Community based Alternatives in an Age of Globalization* (2nd ed.). Australia: Pearson Education. p. 99.

The Infrastructure of Partnerships

Partnerships are not just project collaboration or knowledge sharing, they are relationships that can allow us to accomplish great things. They need, however, to be carefully nurtured and maintained in order to be successful and achieve the desired results.

WE TALK AND TEACH ABOUT COLLABORATIVE partnerships in the community all the time. Partnership, however, should never be taken for granted—it is a relationship that always needs to be worked at, no matter your level of experience. Remembering and honouring the fundamentals of good partnerships is important practice.

We partner with other organizations because we know that collaboration and sharing can accomplish great things. There are, however, many ways to work together that can help achieve the desired results but that fall short of the level of commitment and relationship that partnering requires.

Examining what each organization wants to accomplish and the resources that participants bring to the table will help identify the type of relationship that will be most appropriate to achieving the desired results. Some ways to get started on that process are to establish relationships within the other organization. The goals of each organization need to be clear and understood. It's important to listen and observe the culture of the other organization—it helps to clarify details of process and products, and to highlight any underlying motivations or agendas. There needs to be authentic sharing of risk,

responsibilities, accountabilities, and benefits for a true partnership.

While the term partnership seems to be losing some of its value because it is overused to describe relationships that really aren't partnerships at all, it is a powerful structure that can multiply our capacities to achieve results in communities. What are the fundamentals we need to remember?

1. Ensure you've chosen the right kind of relationship and defined its elements such as length of relationship, defined goals, review, evaluation, and revisions.
2. Make sure there's a clear understanding of the partnership by all the participants.
3. Establish clear procedural ground rules, such as how decisions will be made, roles and responsibilities, and consider putting it all down in writing.
4. Expect problems and disagreements, and remember that successful resolution of conflicts is a critical element of working in partnership.
5. Celebrate all successes, large and small, and remember that the partnership itself is a process to be celebrated. ■

Please join us in building a just and healthy society for all!

ADDRESS _____

FIRST NAME _____

LAST NAME _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

EMAIL ADDRESS (optional) _____

CITY _____

POSTAL CODE _____

1 Join

I will renew my SPARC BC Annual Membership

\$25 Individual \$60 Organization

Low income membership available — contact us for more information.

2 Make a donation

I will further support SPARC BC's programs and services

\$75 \$50 \$35 \$ _____

Payment

I would like to pay by:

- Cheque
 VISA
 MASTERCARD

\$ _____
 TOTAL AMOUNT

CREDIT CARD NUMBER _____

EXPIRY DATE _____/_____/_____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

3 Become a sustaining member

I would like to show my commitment to the work of SPARC BC by becoming a sustaining member and making a **monthly pre-authorized donation in the amount of**

\$20 \$15 \$10 \$ _____

I understand I will receive one tax receipt for my entire donation within a calendar year, and that I may change my donation any time by sending written notice to SPARC BC of my new donation amount.

I prefer to pay by cheque.

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

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

I prefer to pay by credit card.

I authorize SPARC BC to charge my: (check one) VISA MASTERCARD

on the ____ day of each month, beginning _____, 20____, for the amount indicated above.

ACCOUNT NUMBER _____ - _____ - _____

EXPIRY DATE _____/_____/_____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

SPARC BC collects certain personal information from our members and donors during the course of your financial support of the organization in order to manage our relationship with you. For example, as a federally registered charity we collect your name, telephone number and address in order to issue you a tax receipt. Additionally, SPARC BC uses that information to contact you for future donations to support our programs, renew membership, and issue copies of SPARC BC News. The submission of this form constitutes your consent to the collection and use of information for the purposes described above. You may withdraw or change your consent at any time, in respect of your personal information and in respect of any of the purposes described above, by contacting SPARC BC by email info@sparc.bc.ca or phone at (604) 718-7734.

Additionally, on approval of SPARC BC's Board of Directors, SPARC BC may periodically share your contact information with other charitable organizations within BC, so that they may contact you about their local programs. In all cases these organizations would have goals and charitable purposes similar to SPARC BC. No financial information will ever be shared. If you do not wish to have your information used in this manner please contact us by email

- **Parking permit holders: membership in SPARC BC does not affect your permit status.**
- **To update your contact information please: print corrections on the letter address label, call 604-718-7733 or email info@sparc.bc.ca**
- **Please return this form with payment to:**

SPARC BC
201-221 East 10th Ave.
Vancouver, BC V5T 4V3





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