

Dialogues Between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver

Presentation to *Come Together Alberta* • Dec. 2, 2011

Karen Fong, Dialogues Project Coordinator



Project background & rationale

- Though Vancouver is very ethno-culturally diverse, the city's Aboriginal and immigrant communities have few avenues to engage with each other.
- Lack of engagement can lead to misconceptions and low social cohesion.
- Project aims to facilitate engagement between communities and encourage building understanding and strengthening relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities.

Project Steering Group and Project team

Project Steering Group

Provides leadership, advice and support to the implementation of the Dialogues Project. 27 partner groups are represented on the PSG.

Project Chairs

Wade Grant, Musqueam First Nation

Susan Tatoosh, Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre

Henry Yu, UBC Department of History

Project Team

Project Lead: Baldwin Wong

Project Coordinator: Karen Fong

Youth Engagement: Lanny Libby

Consultant on Aboriginal community: Kamala Todd

Youth Community Developers

Project elements

Phase I (Jan 2010 – July 2011) included 5 key initiatives:

1. Dialogue circles
2. Community research
3. Cultural exchange visits
4. Elders & youth program
5. Legacy projects

The project is chronicled in a book and DVD that highlight key events and achievements of the project. A launch event and celebration event were held to mark the start and end of the project.

1. Dialogue Circles

Dialogue circles brought together members of Aboriginal and immigrant communities to share personal stories and perspectives on social inclusion/exclusion and community relations in facilitated discussion circles.



Dialogue Circles – some quotes

Learning

“ I remember when I was a very new immigrant....I hadn't seen any Aboriginal people before, I didn't know them, it was a new place. When I studied at university, my impression was that they had a very [unhappy] history. ”

Dialogue Circles – some quotes

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Racism

“ My journey has been about unlearning. Unlearning 'whiteness' and white privilege, unlearning self-hate...as an immigrant, as a black young girl, as a woman. I am learning the history of this land. ”

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Land and Belonging

“ Many people who have had atrocities against them have been able to leave, recover, and return to reclaim their heritage and history – we have not had this chance. ”

Dialogue Circles



2. Community Research

- **Survey** to gauge perspectives on relations between Aboriginal and immigrant communities.
- **Literature review** to assess availability and quality of resources aimed at newcomers regarding Aboriginal histories, issues and perspectives.
- **Interviews** with key community members (featured in book and video)

3. Cultural Exchange Visits

Cultural exchange visits organized in collaboration with community partners to provide opportunities for community members to visit and engage with local First Nations, urban Aboriginal and immigrant communities.

Cooking exchange between Aboriginal and Afghan women



Visit with Musqueam First Nation



Visit with Tsleil-Waututh First Nation



Visit to the Ismaili community



Visit to the Chinese community in Chinatown



4. Elders & Youth Program

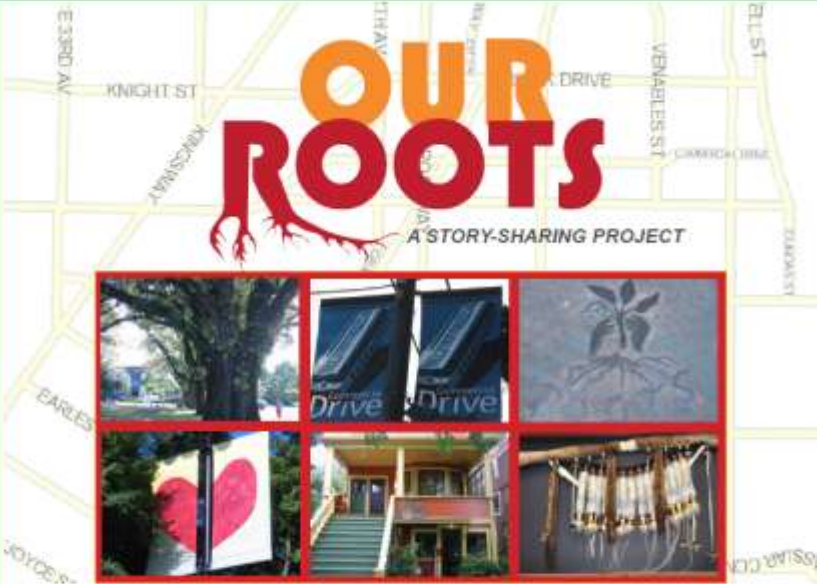
- Aboriginal and immigrant elders met to share issues of mutual interest, particularly around intergenerational and intercultural relations.
- Aboriginal and immigrant youth were recruited to hold their own circles around the same topics.



Photovoice project



5. Legacy Projects



OUR ROOTS
A STORY-SHARING PROJECT


This exhibit celebrates the launch of the *Our Roots* project, a collection of the Aboriginal and immigrant experiences of the Grandview-Woodlands area. See and hear the diverse voices of this community. Witness the rich history that makes this neighbourhood so unique and vibrant.

Come share our stories.

Our Roots is supported by MOSAIC, Britannia Community Centre and the Vancouver Dialogues Project. It is funded by the City of Vancouver's 125th Anniversary Grants Program.

Damara Jacobs - Morris, Project Coordinator
Rosanne Sia, Story Gatherer
Yumiko Onozawa, Story Gatherer

Baldwin Wong, City of Vancouver
Karen Fong, City of Vancouver
Kamala Todd, Project Consultant
Saleem Spindal, MOSAIC




Raylene
Growing up here, hopefully when [my daughter Kathryn] grows up she'll turn out to be a good listener, a helpful person, kind. I would like for her to grow up kind, to have a good sense of humour, just to grow up to be well-rounded and respectful to other people. You know, be respectful to all people. To treat people like she's being treated today. People are good to us, and we're nice, so when other people are new, then she'll be just as helpful to them.

[Kathryn] won't lose her Aboriginal culture growing up in the city. She's learning a city Aboriginal culture. Here we have a Friendship Centre, ten minute walk away. We have an Urban Native Youth Centre, same about ten minutes away. We have an Aboriginal Mother's and Children's food program right next door and then she goes to a school that offers Aboriginal culture and parents are welcome to attend.



Sam
We had the first Italian Days [in the 1970s]. The first year I was the president. We invited many associations from different parts of Italy. We invite them to bring their culture and their food. People were strolling, buy food, buy some wine and some beer. Our object was to introduce Commercial Drive to Vancouver. And we succeeded. After that, it was well known as Italian part of Vancouver. Certain things you still have to come to Commercial Drive to buy. Like in the springtime, they come from all over to buy particular seeds like capote and radicchio. Everybody seems to come up to Commercial Drive to get them. We create that sense of community.



Peggy
The [Aboriginal Friendship Centre] means a lot to me because I have so many different friends here now. I get really lonely sitting at home all by myself. People from all different places they come here. Mihi people, Cree people, and people from all up and down the coast. I just seemed like I fit right in and started doing everything that I'm doing right now.

I belong to a dance group. We're called Rainbow Creek Dancers and we go all over the place. We really love dancing. I use it as a part of my healing with the residential school issues. It helps us a lot. It's kind of like prayer. We try to cook traditional foods, but a lot of time we wouldn't be able to get traditional foods. Smoked salmon and our smoked sock. [Without the Aboriginal Friendship Centre.] I think some of the elders might just live in a room downtown and some of them might not have a place to have their food even, I'm not sure. But I know that the traditional foods are very important for the elders for their strength.



Da
It's the one area where I have least had to worry about how I behave. Who am I here? I don't have to be self-conscious. There's no judgment around. I can dress the way I like. I can be with my friends and partner the way I want without having to second-guess. "Oh, is this okay? Is this appropriate?" Will I get into trouble?" None of that. Some people might not think of the Drive as the safest area. But I do. I feel totally safe and at home here.

I sing with the Cultural Medicine Cabinet, a choir that's largely composed of people who live in the neighbourhood. It's a healing space for people who don't particularly fit into the mainstream. We sing political songs, union songs, gospel, South American activist songs, and African songs. When I sing I enter a zone where other concerns just drop away. You're just with the music and people. You're singing in harmony, joining your voices together. That's an amazing way of connecting, heart to heart. I feel nourished and connected to a wider community after every session.

With support from the City of Vancouver's 125th Anniversary Grants Program



Celebration event



Sustaining inter-community relationships





Dialogues

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www.vancouver.ca/dialoguesproject