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Richmond PRC conducts new 'Dialogue to Action' project

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee (PRC) is conducting a project called "Communities Mobilizing for Justice — Addressing Poverty through Dialogue to Action." Through art and literacy, PRC hosted a series of bi-monthly workshops concentrated on advocacy and leadership training for people with lived experience of poverty. This group has organized themselves into the Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee, or RASC.

RASC members possess a range of skills and abilities and are passionate and committed to becoming leaders and advocates in fighting poverty in their community. In September 2017, they planned and conducted the first ever Poverty Action Forum in Richmond where they committed to an action plan on their priorities of affordable housing, food security and access, public transportation, health, community safety and childcare. Their next forum was on

housing and homelessness. Stay tuned in 2018-2019 for their next sessions on other priority issues.

Key points:

- Gives a unique space and place for people experiencing poverty to express their views safely and, illustrate their life experiences
- Provides an educational opportunity for policy makers, politicians, and all interested parties in public and community life to learn directly from lived experience experts
- Through the use of literary and visual arts, gives an opportunity for the group to collectively discover new talents, build their skills and showcase their learning as advocates and citizen leaders

How we got here:

The Richmond PRC launched the project "Eliminating Barriers to Participation for People Experiencing Poverty" in late 2016.

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Transportation Task Force update

The Transportation Task Force (TTF) is a sub-committee of the Richmond PRC. Taking over the role of chair from departing Alex Nixon is Bruno Vernier, an avid cyclist.

TTF takes its direction from one of the Richmond PRC's seven policy statements, which promotes exploring alternate forms of transportation and increasing affordable public transportation.

In past years TTF has held a number of successful public transportation forums including a February 2017 panel discussion on the proposed Massey Tunnel replacement. In 2018 members have been active as stakeholders in Translink's Fare Review and Distance Pricing. Members have also promoted to the City of Richmond Metro Vancouver's Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing Study. This study establishes the fact that most people using transit also need affordable housing so this housing should be built close to transit hubs.

Recently TTF joined the #AllOnBoard campaign which advocates for free transit for ages 0-18 years and reduced fares for everyone below the poverty level. They will be working through the 2018 municipal campaign to identify candidates that want to improve transit service.

TTF will also take on some issues identified in the Richmond PRC's visioning session, namely promoting the need for more bus routes and more bike lanes and working on educational materials showing how accessible and affordable public transit benefits everyone.

If you are interested in becoming involved, please email info@richmondprc.org.



Busy year for Housing Task Force

Another sub-committee of the Richmond PRC, Vincent Chiu and David Reay are co-chairs of the Housing Task Force (HTF) that hosts meetings with community members interested in affordable housing and homelessness in Richmond.

HTF regularly invites guest speakers to talk about housing

issues, like Metro Vancouver Alliance in August 2017. They work with community groups to build leaders and hold decision-makers to account through accountability forums. Another is the BC Community Land Trust in October 2017, a non-profit organization specializing in acquiring and holding land for the benefit of the broader community. In February, the BCGEU spoke on the Housing Affordability Plan and their document 'Building an Affordable BC.'

HTF made three submissions with recommendations to the City of Richmond, on the Affordable Housing Strategy Update, the Market Rental

Policy and the Wellness Strategy. HTF also participated on the City's Homelessness Needs Assessment steering committee.

From March to mid May, the HTF led a campaign, with a diverse group of compassionate residents called "Richmond United for Supportive Housing" or RUSH, to ensure a 40 unit supportive housing development for the homeless was built in Richmond. In the face of a lot of NIMBYism (Not in My Backyard) the campaign was successful and the City voted to approve the housing! It is slated to open in early 2019.

Richmond food security partnership

We are partnering with Sweet Digz, a Richmond community-supported agriculture enterprise run by two local women. Sweet Digz wants to give back to the community by providing one large fresh organic veggie box to our project for each bi-monthly workshop. The Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee (RASC) group will engage in a project where they prepare, cook and enjoy the food, as well as write a cookbook with stories from their journals and recipes from their families, grandparents, etc. Possible stories may be: 'My granny made the best beet borscht and here is the story she told me...'. The books will include photos of preparing, cooking and enjoying their meals and perhaps quotes about food and nutrition.



On Friday, July 20, several members of the RASC group visited Sweet Digz Farm, receiving a special guided tour and asking lots of questions about the fresh, organic vegetables that the farm grows. They got to take home bagsful of fresh produce.



Sweet Digz Farm

Founded by Kareno Hawbolt and Kimi Hendess in 2010, the duo have been operating their small-scale organic farm in Steveston since 2013. They host a weekly Saturday market from June until mid-November at London Landing. More info: sweetdigz-farm.wordpress.com.



There is 'Hope Beyond Homelessness'

"Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee (RASC) are committed to engaging with the literary arts to explore, educate and inform on topical social issues. No issue can be more relevant and topical to RASC members than the issue of housing and homelessness. With that in mind, RASC member Draigh LeNoire, wrote "Hope Beyond Homelessness." All the roles in the performance are acted by RASC members.

LeNoire wrote the script based on some of his own life experiences and it illustrates the complex, but all too common, interplay of issues that can lead somebody into desperation and homelessness. The play also helps to illustrate how the provision of proper outreach and support services and the availability of suitable housing can save lives and get people back on their feet and into mainstream society.

"Hope Beyond Homelessness" is a powerful, authentic and ultimately moving and unique experience. It has now been put on twice and the plan is to keep performing, eventually taking the play to a larger audience and using it as a vehicle to push for social change. Look for a performance coming up or consider asking for one to take place in your group or community.



Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee hold forum on housing and homelessness

Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee (RASC) is moving from strength to strength. For those that made it to our forum held on June 26 on homelessness, dubbed “From Homelessness to Hope,” it turned out to be a great success. Feedback from those that attended has been extremely positive — however, what did RASC members think of the event themselves? Did it in fact prove to be one that helped them become better leaders and advocates, and get its message on homelessness across?

The answer to those two questions would be a resounding yes! RASC members reported that, “It was a great way for us to all get to know each other, and everyone participated and put themselves out there.”

They also acknowledged the forum was a first step in changing attitudes and, eventually, policy. One participant said, “Talking to the public in attendance, I had some people tell me that the forum had given them new insight to the issues the homeless face”.

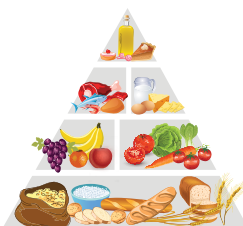
Others remarked, “How life affirming it is to have your voice heard,” and, “We made a start, but when you see members of the public in tears as they are so moved by what they are seeing and hearing, then you know you are doing something right!”



Food security project

In other news, RASC is taking forward our identified anti-poverty objectives by exploring and identifying user friendly solutions to Richmond food security. We will be utilising the arts to identify their own experiences of food security, analysing the research, and identifying and developing important local partnerships. In fact, members are already (look for more on this in the special eating recipe book, distribute free stories relating to food.

The group has been using maps to embarking on a self-directed journey of food preparation. The project is still was to unpack the jargon around what collective definition that people came up with.



working together with Sweet Digz Farm insert of this issue) to develop a healthy organic produce, and explore personal

identify barriers to obtaining good food, education on nutrition, food storage and new but one of the first things we did “food security” means. This is the

“Food security is having enough affordable healthy food to eat. It is having access to all food groups, food that can provide well balanced meals. Food security is about having the knowledge on what to cook and how to cook it. It is having a place to store food and a place to share food.”

- Alan Hill, RASC

The “Barriers” project, through innovative and fully participatory conversation circles, investigated and identified barriers to participation. Funded by the City of Richmond, Vancouver Foundation, Richmond Community Foundation and Literacy Richmond, Barriers was wholeheartedly endorsed by the city’s local service agencies, many of which provide staff resources to ensure the project’s success.

During the conversation circles phase, a group of participants decided they would like to be trained to become community leaders and advocates. RASC was born from this. Affordable housing and homelessness was one of the main issues identified during the conversation circles as being a major factor in poverty, impacting on the life chances of many residents.

In late 2017 the Richmond PRC embarked on the second phase of our initiative, the “Dialogue to Action” project. Since January RASC been holding regular training and support sessions, using the literary arts to develop advocacy and leadership skills and tell life stories. Participants have learned a wide range of skills including poetry and journal writing, photography, food security and recipe writing, public speaking, appreciative inquiry and working with facilitators who are community partners.

For more details or to join RASC please contact project coordinator Alan Hill at afjhill@hotmail.com.

— De Whalen, Richmond PRC



.... a coalition of Richmond residents and agencies working together to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty with research, projects and public education.

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee has a strong track record of identifying gaps in services to the poor in our community, and partnering with suitable agencies to implement effective solutions. We have many ongoing and new projects that need your support.

VOLUNTEER: The RPRC welcomes the participation of all members of the community. There are regular meetings on the first Thursday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at the Richmond Caring Place. We also always need help at events, doing outreach, and putting together our newsletters.

DONATE: As a non-profit organization, the RPRC depends upon generous donors like you. Your tax-deductible gift will help support our research, education, and projects. Please make cheques payable to the Richmond Food Bank Society and add 'Poverty Response Committee' on the memo line. To get involved: call 604-205-1200 or email info@richmondprc.org.

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