

Richmond **FOOD BANK** Society

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Progress Report from the Richmond Food Bank Society - Communities Mobilizing for Justice: Addressing Poverty Through Dialogue to Action (“Dialogue Project”)

On behalf of the Richmond Food Bank Society (“RFBS”) I want to thank you for your interest in the RFBS’s Dialogue Project as facilitated by the Richmond Poverty Response Committee (“PRC”) and to provide you with a progress report. The report also provides recommendations for achieving social change with people experiencing poverty using art as the medium of communication.

The Dialogue Project established a network of low-income residents called the Richmond Advocacy & Support Committee (“RASC”). Throughout the project, the RFBS with the facilitation of the PRC provides support to this group to enable them to become leaders and advocates for people experiencing poverty in Richmond.

The project has engaged local service providers and experts who facilitate dialogues and provide knowledge and skill building while also learning from the lived experiences of the RASC. The RASC incorporates this knowledge and insight into public forums where they tell their stories, thereby educating decision makers and the general public.

RASC members are exhibiting the success of the project by:

- Becoming active decision makers on the PRC steering committee;
- Writing and performing their play “Hope Beyond Homelessness” to a variety of audiences;
- Writing and performing poetry, spoken word, song and creating art installations;
- Promoting their recipe book and tickets to their play to recoup project costs;
- Making presentations to local governments and agencies to encourage systems change; and
- Connecting with service agencies and inviting staff to facilitate workshops on their issues.

As we turn the corner into 2020, the project aims to dig deeper into the impact of homelessness on those without an address and impacts on the whole community; revisit the issues of affordable housing, food justice, transportation, health, and safety; strengthen partnerships with local service agencies; and continue to advocate for systemic change when opportunities arise.

Yours Truly,

Hajira Hussain-Executive Director
Richmond Food Bank Society

Cc De Whalen, Chair PRC
PRC Executive Committee
Alan Hill, Project Manager



“Communities Mobilizing for Justice: Addressing Poverty Through Dialogue to Action”



**Richmond Advocacy and
Support Committee and the
Richmond Poverty Response
Committee**

PROGRESS REPORT

ALAN HILL

JULY 2019

Executive Summary

“Communities Mobilizing for Justice – Addressing Poverty through Dialogue to Action” or the “Dialogue” project.

This report is an update to funders, local decision makers and local media outlets on the progress of this multi-year project undertaken by the Richmond Poverty Response Committee (PRC). The Richmond PRC is “a coalition of Richmond residents and agencies working together to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty with research, projects and public education.”

The “Dialogue” project established a network of low-income residents called the Richmond Advocacy & Support Committee (RASC). The Richmond PRC supports this group to become leaders and advocates for people experiencing poverty in Richmond.

The project engages local service providers, who facilitate dialogues with the RASC, and provide knowledge and skill building while learning from the RASC about problems, barriers and solutions. The RASC then conducts public forums to tell their stories using creative literacy, thereby educating decision makers and the general public and encouraging systemic change. This report provides recommendations for achieving social change with people experiencing poverty. It exemplifies “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

This work would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders. We would like to thank Vancouver Foundation, Richmond Community Foundation and the City of Richmond for their contributions and their belief in the work of the Richmond PRC. Finally, we would like to thank our wonderful staff: Benjamin Yong, Alan Hill and Theresa Head, for none of this work would be possible without them!



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Facilitator Brenda Leadley from the BC Coalition of Arts and Culture with RASC members

A Meaningful and Effective Community Empowerment, Arts and Cultural Initiative in Action

a) What is the Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee (RASC)?

The Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee is an innovative and mutually supportive group of individuals, with direct experience of living with poverty, who are using literary and visual arts developed leadership skills to advocate for social change. Arts for social change can be defined as: *involving the creation of art collectively made by groups of people (who may not self-identify as artists) about what matters to them. This process is facilitated by a specially trained artist or group of artists.*

The overarching objective of RASC is to empower its members to enact social change- do this by directly involving RASC members in the consultations, boards, planning bodies and public debates where social policy is devised, and service delivery planned. The product of RASC work is the group organised and facilitated forums, events, art happenings and meetings where they directly connect with political leaders, policy makers and community leaders. The RASC is

a project where the arts are engaged in actions of direct and effective democracy that bring about, set the condition, for real and lasting social change. Real and lasting social change only happens when those impacted by political decisions/social issues are directly involved in finding solutions. This is what RASC achieves.

The work of the RASC with its arts for social change approach, is designed to engage heads hearts and hands to nurture insight, exchange and action, art for social change is a form of cultural democracy, using the arts to create dialogue and new solutions to often-complex problems of poverty in Richmond.

*Because I'm disabled & poor. . .
...I have to be hungry*

*Because I'm disabled & poor. . .
...I have to accept being shabbily dressed
...I have to accept sneers, scowls, & verbal derision*

*Because I'm disabled & poor. . .
...I have to remain in pain 24/7
...I have to have my apnea untreated
...I have to stop breathing every 5 minutes at night*

*Because I'm disabled & poor. . .
...I have to accept being unemployed
...or, if lucky, under-employed
...or only worthy to volunteer
...I have to accept soaking in my own pee*

*HOWEVER
Because WE are disabled & poor. . .
...WE can work together to demand personhood
...WE can support each other
...WE can sharpen the pitchforks
...WE can drive the train towards hope & change*

George Pope – RASC

b) Background /History and Development of the RASC

The Richmond PRC launched the project “Eliminating Barriers to Participation for People Experiencing Poverty” in late 2016. 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. This group has organized themselves into the Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee, or RASC. Affordable housing/homelessness was one of the main issues identified during the conversation circles as being a major factor for people experiencing low incomes, and 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 2018 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, recipe writing, public speaking, appreciative inquiry and working with facilitators who are community partners (*A full list of involved speakers and partners that have facilitated sessions is available as **Appendix 1***). RASC members possess a range of skills and abilities and are passionate and committed to becoming leaders and advocates in addressing poverty in their community. ***The content of this leadership and advocacy training has been defined, monitored and evaluated, by the participants themselves.***

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 two public forums were in June 2018 where they highlighted affordable housing and homelessness through a play, poetry and visual art to an audience of friends and supporters, city councillors, local decision makers and the general public.

The RASC gives a unique space and place for people experiencing poverty to express their views safely and to illustrate their life experiences. It also 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.



Hugh, Mike, Jonny, Phil, Sovila and Don at RASC's second public forum in June 2018

Case Study 1 - '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 Don Creamer wrote a 30 minute play called "Hope Beyond Homelessness."

Creamer 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 homelessness and desperation. 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 into mainstream society. All the roles are performed by RASC members, most of whom had never acted or spoken in public before.

"Hope Beyond Homelessness" is a powerful, authentic and ultimately moving and unique experience. It has now been mounted three times and the plan is to keep performing and using it as a vehicle to push for social change. The play has been performed across the community and continues to be developed and adapted to a range of audiences. Upcoming performances include a church fundraiser, a community centre staff training session, Metro Vancouver's regional homelessness table, and two senior secondary schools.

c) RASC- Methodology. How RASC Works.

Each quarter a theme that was identified in the earlier ‘Barriers’ project is chosen by the group as the issue to be explored in the coming months. A workplan for that quarter is then developed by the group itself, issues broken down, actions and guest speakers/facilitators identified. The RASC group has developed its own code of conduct for meetings and member participation. All members are encouraged to participate equally, and dialogue is held in a supportive and confidential environment. Decision making is by group consensus.

The sessions are held every two weeks (1st and 3rd Friday of the month) the group, at any one time, consists of about eight to ten individuals. Each session exposes professionals to the learning experience of gaining first hand insight into the lived experience of poverty and first-hand feedback on the services that professional is responsible for. In return, members of the group gain first hand knowledge of services and procedures directly from the professional. Thoughts and feelings related to the barriers explored and issues identified are then developed through arts and cultural programming. Arts and cultural programming may be led by guest facilitators from the arts world or directly devised and explored by the group themselves. The group has built up a core repertoire of arts and cultural tools practice, including experimental poetry writing, song writing, playwriting, comedy skit writing, story writing, photography. The product of each quarterly block of sessions is always a **public form** where issues identified are explored through the arts to an audience of policy makers, decision makers and politicians.

As of summer, 2019 three **public forums** have been held, linking policy makers and decision makers to those with lived experience of poverty. The first two of these were on the topic of homelessness and housing and the third on the topic of food justice and transportation. A fourth on the topic of health, wellness and safety is to be held in fall 2019.

d) RASC Recruitment

The only stipulation for group membership is lived experience of low income. The group has no formal entry requirements or procedures. The group has developed its own outreach package and regularly sends delegations of its members out to speak directly to those who may be interested in joining.

e) RASC a Worldwide Movement/ Social Engagement and Arts

Socially engaged practice, also referred to as social practice or socially engaged art, can include any artform which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction. This can often be organised as the result of an outreach or education program, but many independent artists also use it within their work.

The participatory element of socially engaged practice, is key, with the artworks created often holding equal or less importance to the collaborative act of creating them. As Tom Finkelpearl outlines in his book *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*, social practice is ‘art that’s socially engaged, where the social interaction is at some level the art.’

What Keeps Us Well

Sitting outside each day, rain and shine.

*Wearing a bright smile and a
spring in our steps.*

Not letting people bring us down.

Believing ourselves, we can do it, be happy.

*Letting ourselves be happy, kind, mindful,
be ourselves.*

Letting ourselves be loved and love, dream.

RASC- 2019

f) Social Practice and Activism

Socially engaged practice can be associated with activism because it often deals with political issues. Artists who work within this field will often spend much time integrating into the specific community which they wish to help, educate or simply share with. Artist Rick Lowe explains:

“You have to spend years developing relationships... It’d be an arrogant disregard of a community to come in and think you can grasp all the complexities of a place in a short time”.
Interview with Carolina A. Miranda, LA Times, 2014

The artists’ aim could be to help this community work towards a common goal, raise awareness and encourage conversation around issues, or perhaps to improve their physical or psychological conditions. Socially Engaged Art

The RASC believes that the success of the projects that we deliver depends upon the relationships that develop between artists, communities, community organisers and the organisations who deliver services within communities. The creative collaborations that result are socially engaged because they deliver locally specific and community led outcomes for and with communities. Socially engaged art is situated within the wider arena of Public Art and is defined by Miwon Kwon in *One Place After Another: Site Specificity and Locational Identity* [MIT Press, 2002] as art- in-the-public-interest, as it foregrounds social issues, political activism and community collaborations.



*Don inside the
"Home is..."
photo art installation
at Branscombe House,
Richmond, BC*

Case Study 2 – Photography Art Installation: ‘Home is...’

The RASC members used single use cameras to create a photographic montage /sculpture that explored the reality of ‘home’. They added lines of their poetry to the photos, then connected them by threads into ‘curtains’ and hung them on a pvc pipe-built house structure.

The ‘Home is...’ art installation has been displayed five times including the Vancouver Foundation Neighbourhood Small Grants presentation as well as the BC Housing Central conference, the largest non-profit housing conference in BC.

Aims: A Photography Project to Show what home means to us:

- How the home we live in helps us feel part of our community.
- How home is a place that makes us feel comfortable and where we can invite friends.
- How having access to transit, shops and services is important to feeling at home.
- How the physical accessibility inside and around our home is vitally important.
- That when housing is expensive and insecure (both financially and physically) then that can make us feel insecure in ourselves and undermine our opportunities in life.
- Inadequate housing (too expensive, insecure and non-accessible) does not make us feel at home.

g) Definitions of Socially Engaged Art

According to Lynn Froggett, et al., in their report “[New Model Visual Arts Organisations & Social Engagement](#)”, socially engaged practices are developed and delivered:

“...through collaboration, participation, dialogue, provocation and immersive experiences. The organisations focus on process and seek to embed themselves within the communities among whom they work. This puts them in a position to respond to the specific needs and agendas of communities and hence to widen audience participation.”

In addition, RASC aligns its methodology with **New Genre Public Art** as described by Suzanne Lacy [Ed], in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art, USA, Bay Press, 1995. Lacy states that New Genre Public Art work:

- Engages with culture
- Seeks a relationship with its audience
- Aims to influence social strategy.

The artists who work in this genre can be described as operating with an “expanded repertoire” which includes social issues, creative and learning processes as well as artistic production, and with the goal “to make art that matters”.

The artists “expanded repertoire”, makes possible a more intimate and engaged relationship for the artist with their audience, enables them to consider their intentions in a social as well as a cultural field, promotes interaction and questions effectiveness.

The artists “expanded repertoire”, makes possible:

- A more intimate and engaged relationship for the artist with their audience,
- enables them to consider their intentions in a social as well as a cultural field,
- promotes interaction and change
- questions effectiveness. [Lacy]



RASC members tasting cherry tomatoes at Sweet Digz organic farm June 2018

Case Study 3. ‘Serving Up Memories:’ a collaborative recipe book

This community recipe book was developed by RASC members in partnership with Family Services of Greater Vancouver and Sweet Digz, a local organic farm which provided free organic produce to the group. RASC members started the project by writing stories and poems about food security and this led to the group then taking a field trip to Sweet Digz and later, participating in two community kitchens with FSGV.

The recipe book features healthy recipes, tried and tested and suggested by RASC members and contains personal stories about food and memories associated with that food. The recipe book is also available to the general public and a fundraising device, assisting RASC attain some financial sustainability. ‘Serving Up Memories’ has also been added to the Richmond Public Library collection under ‘local authors.’

The expanded reach for the arts includes:

- Social change
- Personal development, wellbeing, informal learning, transferable skills development
- Community development and cohesion – stronger communities with a sense of pride and belonging and ownership
- Artistic production – making art that matters

RASC members and guest artists are socially engaged: meaning that they work with genuine depth and ‘an expanded repertoire’. As a result, participants feel supported and have time and

space for personal and social reflection, development, and progression: they explore social issues, creative learning processes and artistic production. Artists interweave real quality into creative processes and individual and group outcomes. In addition, the participants learn transferable skills: as well as the art form itself, they learn communications, reflection tools, how to research and develop an idea, group communications and interpersonal skills.



*Theresa as
“The Food Fairy”
at the RASC
October 2018
Public Forum*

Case Study 4 – “The Food Fairy & Other Stories’ Food Justice and Transportation

In October 2018 the RASC held a Public Forum on food justice and transportation. The RASC used comedy skits, poetry, music and story telling to communicate the reality of food security and transportation and how the two issues are connected- where you live and where you shop depends on decent transit.

An audience of policy makers, politicians and the general public were able to learn directly about the social consequences of poor quality and expensive public transit, food security systems and how they are engineered to trap people in poverty and what it is like to not be able to afford healthy eating options.

The forum also unveiled some positive examples of user-led social change. Using literary arts, the group also talked about and shared community cooking ideas and healthy eating initiatives.

h) The Lived Experience of RASC Membership

The proof of the worth of RASC is in the experience and more complete range of social and economic opportunities that have been made available to its members. Monitoring and evaluation have been ongoing with regular participant led reflection and feedback sessions. Through this process the RASC members themselves continue to define and shape the structure of the program. The RASC members are asked several broad questions.

What has been the best part of being in RASC?

RASC, through the advocacy of its members, has assisted get modular housing in Richmond and in pushing to get greater public transportation access for those on low income. Through her involvement in RASC, a member of the group stood for City Council and for the first-time poverty and homelessness were election issues at municipal level. RASC members reported that the best part of being part of RASC has been...

“Helping to get more modular housing for Richmond residents”- Theresa

“Standing for election for City Council” – Theresa

“Meeting new people and learning so much, learning drama skills” – Sovila

“Being part of a good cause” – Hugh

“Being able and motivated to be creative with writing and acting in a play and I have had fun”- Don

“being part of RASC has given me a purpose, a mission in life and kept me clean and drug free. We are giving a voice to the voiceless” - Don

“Feeling part of my local community, having a purpose” – Phil

“Raising awareness about living on low income, addiction and recovery, making friends and being creative” - Karin

“Helping each other and writing songs” - Phil

What Have we achieved?

RASC members reported that they have achieved, across the board, awareness and stigma reduction around issues to do with poverty, how people perceive those on low income. RASC members have also directly learned the benefits of collective action, by and for those on low income, and how this can directly influence decision makers and social change. RASC members reported that...

“We have opened people’s eyes and educated about poverty and helped to remove stigma” – Phil

“We have enabled policy makers to have a greater, in depth understanding of the needs of marginalised people- see us as people and not objects and have a clearer idea of our needs and supports”- Karin

“Those that are policy makers have been informed about what it is really like to be poor”- Don

“We have learned how to work collectively for a good cause, learned how to be team players, got the word out about issues and gaps in services for those on low income”- Hugh

“We learned how to work together and help each other as a team” – Sovila

“learning to write- songs poetry and stories –using our skills to help get social housing in Richmond’ – Theresa

What Changes Have We Seen in Richmond?

RASC members, through the work of RASC have observed real changes in the community. Members report that...

“We have seen people come together and help each other” - Sovila

“People in the community are slowly learning about homelessness, see the homeless as real people”. Don

“I have seen changes in BC Housing- they seem to be listening more” – Theresa

“We played a part in helping City Council make a good decision on modular housing” – Don

“We did our bit to push for bus passes for those on low income” – Don

“People being more aware of the issues for the homeless, which became a local election issue for the first time because of our work” – Karin

“Changing transit for the better and better more housing” – Phil

How has RASC Changed my life?

A big learning for RASC members has been the link between personal and wider social development and change. As social issues have been worked on, through a process where the needs of individual members are acknowledged and respected, members have developed

personally and simultaneously facilitated social change in the community. Personal and social change are directly linked. Members report that...

“I have become less shy and more open, able to speak my mind” -Phil

“RASC is my family circle, more than my biological family” – Phil

“Self acceptance, receiving care and respect in way I often have not, strengthening my skills and self confidence from having my views heard and considered” - Karin

“RASC has opened my mind to how changes can be made. When you have the right people and support great things can happen. People like us, on low income, can go on living” – Theresa

“I am learning and have learned about poverty and how to get change” - Sovila

i) Recommendations/Learnings for Achieving Social Change with those living with Direct Experience of Poverty and Associated Barriers

1. That policy making and planning of services for those living in poverty are greatly improved, more appropriate, better targeted, if those living in poverty, are involved in planning and decision making.
2. That leadership and advocacy training for those living with poverty and social barriers should be a process led, formed, and at the pace dictated, by those participating. Facilitators can provide structure and support but effective processes, the leadership and advocacy training itself, need to be defined and developed by participants.
3. There is a need for (RCSAC, Richmond Community Collaboration Table- CCT) and statutory agencies, including the City of Richmond, to plan out supported, resourced and appropriate, consultation, board and advisory body membership opportunities and general civic involvement opportunities for RASC graduates.
4. That boards, decision making bodies, are more effective, more user focussed and able to deliver better governance, when those with direct experience of the issues are involved in real and meaningful way.
5. Involvement for those living with poverty must be properly supported, with the individual and needs and skills of those involved being properly supported and fully considered. The personal and the political must **and can** be simultaneously addressed.
6. That, when working with those on low income, those facing barriers, **process** is key. The need for trust, respect and belonging need to be addressed first and foremost before wider social issues and political processes can be engaged.

7. That a comprehensive approach is taken where the links between social issues (e.g. transportation, community safety, housing) are addressed and acknowledged in a manner that reflects the life experience of how these issues are experienced by those living with poverty.
8. That the literary and visual arts have a vital role to play as an engagement tool that can assist those living with poverty to develop both personally and in terms of engagement with social issues.



Keely, Sovila, Jonny, Mike, Theresa and Phil at their second Public Forum at Richmond General Hospital, June 2018.

APPENDIX 1

COMMUNITY SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES & PARTNERS

2018	Local Community Resource	Facilitator
	2018 Topics: Housing, Food, Transit	
	Family Services of Greater Vancouver	Minoo Javadi
	Sweet Digz organic farm	Kimi Hendess
	Food Security Forum keynote speaker	Colin Dring
	Song writing workshops (housing, food, transit)	Michael Averill
	Richmond City Clerk's office (civic election)	David Weber
	Collaborative Poetry (homelessness)	Anneliese Schultz
	Richmond Artist in Residence 2018 (homelessness)	Keely O'Brien
	Poor-nography public event (How laws make us poor)	Cllr. Jean Swanson
	Richmond Centre for Disability (public speaking)	Dina McGinnis
	Residential Tenancy Act (retired arbitrator)	Lee Murphy
	BCGEU research report on Affordable Housing	Kari Michaels
2019	Local Community Resource	Facilitator
	2019 Topics: Health, Safety, Acting tips	
	Trauma-informed Yoga	Dr. Neelu Kang
	VCH Community Engagement Advisory Network	Belinda Boyd
	VCH Community Mental Health & Substance Abuse	Zach Findlay
	Richmond Mental Health Consumers & Friends	Cory Tymich
	Translink Police (safety on transit)	Julien Ponsioen
	Dreamcatchers workshop (Cree First Nation)	Don Tourangeau
	Carnegie Action Committee (peer advocacy)	Jill MacKenzie
	VCH Overdose Prevention project	Jessie Sutherland
	Lived Experience overdose prevention speaker	Vince Bulteel
	BC Alliance for Arts and Culture	Brenda Leadley
	Richmond Secondary School Drama teacher	Ivonne An
	Creative Alchemy (visual and performance artist)	Marina Szijarto

Acknowledgement

Communities Mobilizing for Justice-Addressing Poverty through Dialogue to Action” or the “Dialogue” Project established a network of low-income residents called the Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee (RASC). The Richmond PRC facilitated by the Richmond Food Bank Society, supports this group to become leaders and advocates for people experiencing poverty in Richmond. Using creative literacy, this group aims at educating decision makers and the general public to bring about social change with people experiencing poverty. It exemplifies the idea “Nothing about us without us.”

We are grateful to all the local service providers for facilitating dialogues with the members of the RASC and providing them with the knowledge and skills to tell their stories so they can continue to educate the decision makers to bring about systemic change.

This work would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders. We would like to thank Vancouver Foundation, Richmond Community Foundation and the City of Richmond for their contributions and their belief in the work of the Richmond PRC.

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