

Fall 2014

vancouver foundation

stories of modern philanthropy



SURPASSING \$1 BILLION

Setting new granting milestones

SAVE THE SOB STORY

Former foster kids take action

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Deconstructing belonging

REAL LIFE OPERA

Bullying takes centre stage

BUILDING AN
*empowered
& vibrant*
FUTURE

PM 40065475

Difficult decisions: choosing which projects to fund

As a charitable foundation whose purpose is to fund projects and programs that will make life better for the people who live in our communities, the process of granting is an exciting one. Yet it's also challenging at the same time.

Vancouver Foundation receives hundreds of proposals for worthwhile projects every year, but we simply cannot fund them all – which means making some difficult choices. On average, we receive requests for up to five times as much money as we have available to grant. With so much need in the community, and so many worthwhile initiatives seeking funding, how do we best decide where to allocate our granting dollars?

Our vision is one of healthy, vibrant and livable communities across British Columbia – and no one knows community needs better than community members. That's why consulting with community volunteers is a crucial aspect of determining what our granting priorities should be. For example, our current focus on connections and engagement is in response to our community consultation in 2011, which found that people in metro Vancouver felt an increasing sense of isolation and disconnect from their local neighbourhoods. Another overriding issue people are concerned about, according to our research, is youth homelessness – which was the impetus for launching our Youth Homelessness Initiative.

Once we know what issues are of greatest importance to British Columbians, the next step is to make sure we truly understand those issues. We do this by conducting surveys and reports such as our 2012 metro Vancouver survey, *Connections and Engagement*, measuring people's community connections and engagement, and our 2013 survey of public attitudes toward foster youth aging out of government care, *Fostering Change*. A better understanding of the problem is the key to knowing which initiatives will be most effective – and would therefore be most worthwhile to fund.

And finally, to make sure we're putting our donors' resources to best use, Vancouver Foundation relies on Advisory Committees for each of our granting areas that donors can choose to support: animal welfare; arts and culture; children, youth and families; education; environment; health and medical education/research; health and social development; youth homelessness; and youth philanthropy.

Together, these Advisory Committees comprise more than 150 volunteer experts – scientists, academics, leaders and frontline staff – who generously dedicate their time to help us make informed granting decisions. They share their expertise and intimate knowledge of the issues, emerging trends, community needs and organizations that are active in their fields. They review and evaluate grant applications and make recommendations directly to the board of Vancouver Foundation about which ones will have the most impact in the community.

From deciding which issues to tackle, to choosing the projects and programs that will make the greatest difference, informed decision-making is of paramount importance at Vancouver Foundation – and donors can be assured they are supporting worthwhile projects in communities throughout the province. ☺



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Here are a few of the projects Vancouver Foundation and our donors recently supported

 Indicates a project funded by a Neighbourhood Small Grant



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Pedal pushers

Building new bike lanes isn't the only way to get more people pedalling. Cycling advocate Gudrun Langolf says lots of bicycles stay stored in garages simply because they are in need of minor repairs or adjustments.

So, with a \$1,000 Neighbourhood Small Grant, Langolf hosted five Bike Fun and Fitness clinics in the Marpole area of south Vancouver to help riders get back on the road. Volunteers helped neighbours and passersby make minor repairs to their bicycles and handed out safety equipment, like reflective stickers and bike lights. They also shared information about other bike maintenance resources, repair instructions, and local cycling-route maps.

Equipment purchased with the grant, including a bike stand and air pumps, will be stored at the Marpole Neighbourhood House and be made available for use by expert and amateur cyclists alike.

Thankful thoughts

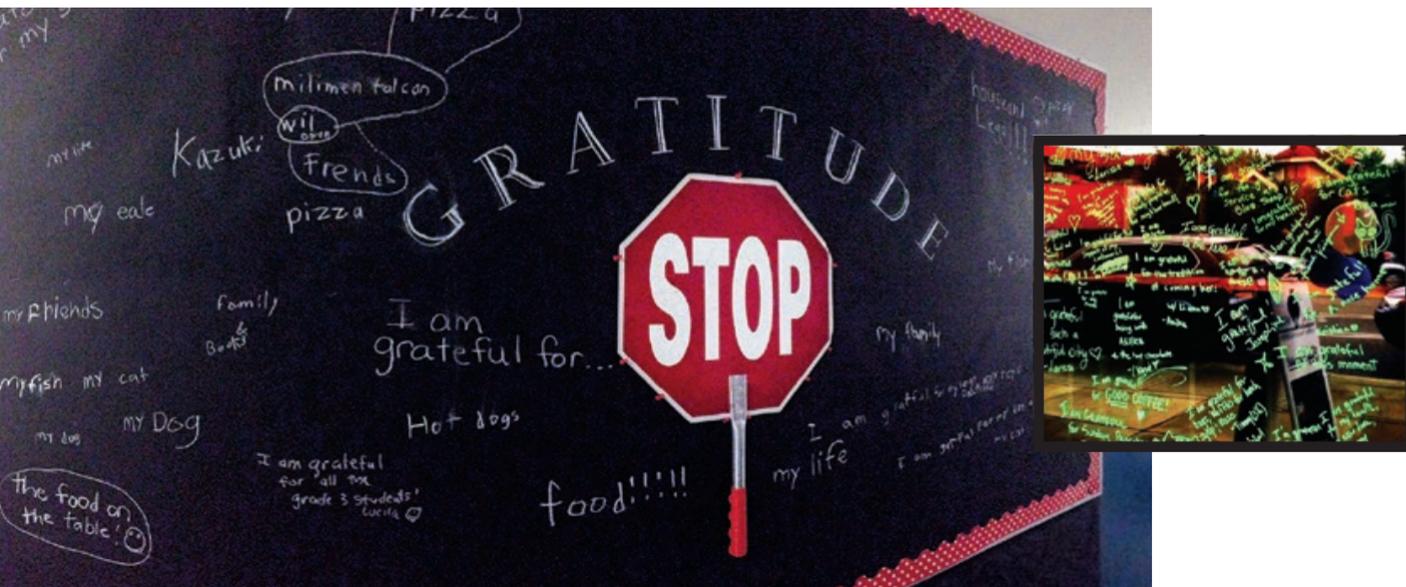
Thousands of people from sea to shining sea have been reminded to express their gratitude for everything from the everyday to the extraordinary, thanks to Lucila McElroy and Candice Davenport.

The duo originally started the Gratitude Graffiti Project in New Jersey two years ago, and with the help of a \$689 Vancouver Foundation Neighbourhood Small Grant, McElroy brought it to the Dunbar area in the 40 days leading up to Thanksgiving last fall. The local project

provided gratitude stops all around the neighbourhood, encouraging people to reflect on things for which they were thankful and to share their gratitude by writing it down.

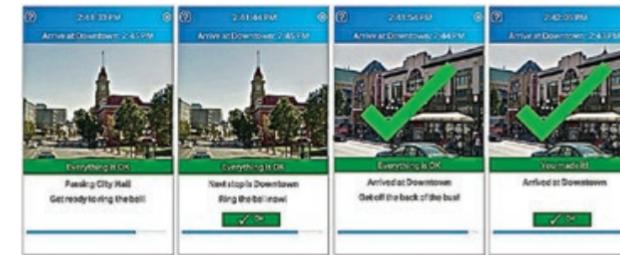
"An action of mind can be very powerful," says McElroy of the practice of gratitude, noting the cause has been picked up by other neighbourhoods around the Greater Vancouver area and as far away as the Philippines.

Vancouver Foundation granted another \$1,000 to continue the project in 2014.



High-tech help

For individuals with cognitive disabilities, time management and travelling independently can be significant barriers to maintaining stable employment. CanAssist is a program at the University of Victoria that develops innovative technologies and programs for users with a focus on promoting independence and inclusion. Its Apps for Employment Project is designed to help people with disabilities, especially those with cognitive challenges, to be more successful in employment settings.



Vancouver Foundation granted a total of \$192,340 to support the development of two software applications that are expected to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. CanWork is primarily a scheduling app, while CanGo will use GPS to support the use of public transportation and can allow its users to be tracked by caregivers or job coaches. Both apps are still in the testing phase, but are expected to be released for downloading on both Apple and Android devices in the spring of 2015.

Hats off to Aunt Leah

Research shows that more than 50 per cent of young Canadians between the ages of 20 and 24 live with their parents – a luxury, especially in a real estate market like the Lower Mainland. But what if you don't have parents? Where do you crash to save money for school? Who helps you cobble together enough for a damage deposit? And where does that hand-me-down couch come from?

Since 2006, Aunt Leah's House has been helping foster youth in B.C. to get on their feet as they age out of care at 19. Specifically, Aunt Leah's Link program aims to prevent or reduce their chance of experiencing homelessness by teaching youth practical skills such as budgeting, meal planning and job hunting, and offering them a safety net should they fall back. A University of Victoria study released in May 2014, *Avoiding the Precipice*, affirmed the value and cost-effectiveness of the Link program, describing it as "a relatively low-intensity intervention that yielded positive outcomes for youth." Vancouver Foundation has helped to fund the Link program since 2010.

Photos: iStock; courtesy Gratitude Graffiti; courtesy CanAssist; courtesy Out in Schools

Film stars

More than 300 contestants entered 90 submissions in the Out in Schools 2013 Rise Against Homophobia youth short video contest – its best year yet.

Open to students in grades 8 through 12, the national contest is an initiative of the B.C.-based Out in Schools program, a unique high school outreach initiative that engages youth through film to promote safe and diverse learning environments free from homophobia, transphobia and bullying.



With help from a Vancouver Foundation Youth Philanthropy Council grant for \$3,000, three finalists were chosen. The winning videos premiered at the 25th Vancouver Queer Film Festival and are now shown in Out in Schools presentations across the province.

—Mikelle Sasakamoose



Reaching \$1 Billion

Vancouver Foundation
is reaching milestones –
and setting new ones

By VALERIE McTAVISH
ILLUSTRATION SARA TYSON

\$1 billion. That's the staggering amount of money Vancouver Foundation has granted to worthy projects since its inception in 1943. It's an impressive milestone, but the Foundation doesn't take all of the credit and it certainly doesn't see it as the finish line – far from it.

Achieving this milestone has been a team effort including the Foundation, the community, philanthropists, partner charities and a lot of volunteers. It is also thanks, in part, to a solid, long-range financial plan. Vancouver Foundation president and CEO Kevin McCort explains, "through a combination of donations, prudent management and long-term investing, we've been able to generate this substantial amount of granting."

However, offering individual donors, charities and community foundations a flexible, centralized hub through which they can distribute their charitable donations has also been a significant driver in generating \$1 billion in grants. "Our giving is really universal. We can support any charity in the province and our fund holders can grant to any Canada Revenue Agency-registered charity in Canada," says McCort.

This provides individuals and family foundations who want to create an endowment or make a large donation with a simplified and reliable way to designate specific charities or causes that they'd like to support. Donors may prefer to allow Vancouver Foundation to determine where the funds are most needed. The Foundation regularly checks the pulse of the community through initiatives like the *Vital Signs* survey to identify areas of need in the community and directs grants accordingly. McCort reports that there are about 500 charities benefiting from these adjudicated grants annually and approximately 1,200 charitable organizations that receive funding because they have been specifically named by donors.

These grants are made possible through Vancouver Foundation's endowment. It all started in 1943 when Alice MacKay had saved \$1,000 from her secretarial job and wanted to help impoverished women in Vancouver by establishing an endowment. Ten prominent Vancouverites were moved by the gesture and added \$10,000 each to the endowment, bringing the total to \$101,000.

Over the years, the endowment has grown to a significant enough sum to enable Vancouver Foundation to earn preferable interest rates. "Our five-year rates of return on the endowment are in excess of 10 per cent," says McCort. In addition to its role as a community grant maker to charitable agencies, the Foundation offers services to smaller charities and other community foundations to help them maximize their own endowments and donations. He explains, "Most charities, if they've got even \$1 million on the side that they don't need for their operations, the only thing they are going to do is invest that in GICs and treasury bills, and they might earn one or two per cent." The increased earning power gained by consolidating with Vancouver Foundation's fund makes a significant impact on the level of work a charity can do in the community. McCort adds, "It's something that charities simply cannot do on their own."

This consolidated investing service not only helps organizations earn more from their existing endowments, but it also helps them attract new donors (either directly or through Vancouver Foundation) since donors can see that their gift is going to grow at a rate that can really make a difference. "We want to make sure that any charity in the province, really, has the capacity to capture or accept an endowed gift," says McCort.

Vancouver Foundation offers this same service to community foundations around the province. In fact, many of these foundations got their start with a little help from an initiative that Vancouver Foundation ran from 1999 to 2007. "We recognized that there would be many donors across the province who may want to endow a gift in their own community as opposed to endowing a gift to Vancouver Foundation," says McCort.

The startup support program was twofold. Vancouver Foundation provided funds to match donations raised by local community foundations. It also provided some funding to allow the new foundations to make immediate grants. This created the initial momentum to attract more donations to the endowment.

"We felt that those startup community foundations would be caught in a chicken-and-egg dynamic," explains McCort. "They have an endowment but it's too small to generate income, and if it's not generating income then no one is going to see the granting and the results of that."

The support efforts worked. There are now 51 community foundations in B.C. (out of a total 191 in Canada) and Vancouver Foundation manages the endowment capital for 34 of them.

There are about 500 charities benefiting from adjudicated grants annually and approximately 1,200 charitable organizations that receive funding because they have been specifically named by donors

By working with these foundations, and by following its own mandate to serve the entire province, Vancouver Foundation supports a wide variety of charitable organizations, geographically speaking. Seventy per cent of its discretionary granting goes to organizations in the Lower Mainland while the remaining 30 per cent is spread out around the province, including projects from Haida Gwaii to Smithers to Nelson.

It's not just distance that showcases the breadth of giving from the Foundation. There is also a vast variety in the size of grants given. Vancouver Foundation supports projects that require as much as \$80,000 a year over a three-year period or a one-time grant of as little as \$100 to set up a lending library or put on a neighbourhood workshop.

Each granted project comes from a need identified by the community. McCort says, "We have the systems that enable us to do what we call 'grassroots granting' or 'micro-granting' that are very cost-effective because they rely on volunteers and they rely on advisory committees. That helps us do small-scale granting."

Continued commitments to assessing community needs, prudent fiscal management, and working with new and existing donors are what will lead to the next milestone in Vancouver Foundation's future. McCort would like to see the community foundation startup support reinstated: "I think that was a good idea that we started and we think that there is a great opportunity going forward to really work with community foundations across the province."

McCort is also excited by the fresh, progressive programs and projects that Vancouver Foundation is seeing. "It's an exciting time to be in philanthropy in B.C. There are a lot of fantastic charities doing really interesting work," he says.

McCort shares that Alice MacKay's original endowment is still at work to support women living in poverty. "We would like to be able to say we can no longer fulfil the wishes of this donor because the problem has been solved. That's something that we wish would happen more often." That's why, despite the celebrations, Vancouver Foundation doesn't see the "\$1 billion granted" milestone as "mission complete."

"There is no question that if we've given only \$1 billion, we're going to be giving away another. We don't know how long it's going to take but it'll happen," he says. "And a community foundation is a great vehicle to make sure that money lands in meaningful areas and is managed by competent and effective organizations." ☺

If you would like to help Vancouver Foundation continue its goal of creating healthy, vibrant and livable communities in British Columbia, please call Calvin in Development & Donor Services at 604.629.5357, or visit vancouverfoundation.ca/give

Let's Get Cooking



A brand-new culinary training program is giving at-risk youth the skills, experience and confidence to transition back into the mainstream workforce

By ROBIN SCHROFFEL | PHOTOS CLAUDETTE CARRACEDO

A new café has popped up in downtown Vancouver, serving up hot entrees, sandwiches, soups and salads to a busy lunch crowd. While ordinarily this wouldn't be news, Café 335 is different: the affordable social enterprise eatery is staffed by graduates of the Culinary Skills Training Program, a collaboration between Coast Mental Health and Vancouver Community College (VCC). And the café, located at 335 West Pender Street in a retail storefront at Pacific Coast Apartments, stands as a tangible mark of the program's success.



Culinary Skills Training Program participant AJ Willan is learning the technical skills and building up the confidence to launch her culinary career.

The Culinary Skills Training Program, which began its inaugural run June 9, teaches cooking skills to young adults aged 19 to 30 who are struggling with various barriers to employment, including mental health issues and addictions. Taught by a VCC instructor, it covers the first third of a 12-month VCC diploma program, including theory and kitchen time, and the skills are directly transferable to the job site for positions such as line cooks.

“We were looking at the people that really needed the support, who really needed a chance,” explains Tracy Schonfeld, director of community services with Coast Mental Health, who worked for nearly three years to get the program off the ground. Funding to the tune of \$100,000 from Vancouver Foundation allowed Jason Payne, youth program co-ordinator, to be hired on early in 2014 and the ball was rolling in a matter of months.

The program initially received 34 applications, far surpassing Payne and Schonfeld’s expectations. “It was very obvious as we started to recruit applicants that there’s a real need for this age group to find something meaningful, but not being able to really plug into anything because they’ve been out of it for so long,” Schonfeld says. “These are folks in their mid-20s who have been struggling with mental illness, who have probably done quite a bit of work in their early 20s, with not much to recommend them on a resumé because they’ve been doing their own work getting better and getting healthy.

“Some of them weren’t able to finish high school because their illness would have started in their late teens. They don’t have strong relationships with their peers because of their illness – they kind of get marginalized. Oftentimes they don’t have strong family connections or they’ve dropped out a little bit because they’ve had addictions issues, or their mental illness had cycled before it got stable. There’s fear, shame, all the things that go along with being disconnected from normal community.”

After conducting one-to-one interviews, Payne and Schonfeld put together a group of 14 that they felt would benefit the most. Classes run five days a week, five hours a day, for five months. A few months in, they were left with a core group of 11, a figure that amazes Schonfeld. “We really did pick people who were quite vulnerable. I was going to be happy to have six left, if that, because we’re asking so much of them,” she says.

One of these 11 participants is AJ Willan. As she steps out of class to chat for a few minutes – it’s theory this week – her enthusiasm is infectious. The program has been a life-changing experience for the articulate 24-year-old, who was previously a peer support worker and struggles with social anxiety and depression. “I feel like I’ve learned so much. It’s helped me to push myself and really do something that I love,” she says, smiling. “It’s actually helped with my social anxiety quite a bit because I have people here who really value me as a person and the skills that I bring to the table.”

Besides learning the basics of cooking, sanitation and knife skills, the students cook a daily meal for the hundred or so residents of Pacific Coast Apartments, a supportive housing site managed by Coast Mental Health. Willan and a few others often stay afterwards, volunteering their personal time to serve the meal. “This building houses many people that struggle with mental health issues and a lot of them are my peers who I’ve worked with before. I know all their faces, I can say hi to them – it’s just another way to support my community,” Willan says, adding, “The residents have been coming to us and telling us how awesome the food is, which is great. We brought the level up.”

Early on, one of the biggest challenges for the program was attendance – a huge factor for a group that may have medical or other life issues that make getting to class on time difficult. “The majority of them were late, missing days, leaving early, things like that. But once they started to settle in and realize that we’re supporting them in the long run, attendance has been unbelievable,” says Payne.

Now, near the end of the program, most students arrive half an hour early to have breakfast together and chat. “It’s been incredible to watch the growth, just being able to watch them have that connection and make those friendships and feel confident,” Schonfeld says.

That sense of support and community is something Willan feels strongly as well. “Since we’ve been working together, we’ve all become good friends. It’s like a little family now,” she says. “It’s built a lot more

of a routine. It’s really been beneficial to me, to get me motivated. I want to wake up and come here every day.”

She feels similarly about the social enterprise café, which opened September 24. It’s a low-cost grab-and-go option with seating for 12, serving the downtown lunch rush between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday to Friday, with a menu based on the successful Broadway VCC campus café’s offerings. With its cheerful green walls, spacious kitchen area and shining new stainless steel appliances, the café gives the students another opportunity to learn, shine and earn a living – shifts here are paid, just like any other job.

In addition to providing Willan with a job to transition into, the program has opened doors that she’d never before dreamed of. The pride in her voice is palpable as she reveals her plan to complete the culinary diploma program as a full-time student at VCC and the steps towards this goal she’s taking right now. “It’s so exciting. I would have never thought that I could do this,” she says. “A couple years ago, I would have never even thought that this would be an option for me.” ∞

To support innovative community projects like the Culinary Skills Training Program at Café 335, call Kristin in Development & Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation at 604.629.5186, or visit vancouverfoundation.ca/give

Trial by Fire

A new study aims to improve the quality of life for burn survivors

By CAROL CRENN
Photo KIM MALLORY



At age 23, Heidi Cave was driving with a friend when a car ran a red light, hit her in the intersection, and sent her car crashing into a ravine. It landed upside down and caught on fire – the two young women trapped inside. Cave’s friend was killed on impact, and Cave’s burns from the torso down were so severe that both of her legs had to be amputated.

“I was taken to hospital, and then moved to the burn unit at VGH. I spent seven months there undergoing many surgeries and recovery from burns that were down to muscle and bone,” recalls Cave.

Cave is one of more than 100 adults in British Columbia admitted to the B.C. Professional Fire Fighters’ burn unit at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) each year, traumatized and suffering from serious burns. There, all patients are referred to as “burn survivors.”

Yet, surviving is not enough, says Dr. Anthony Papp, medical director at VGH’s burn unit. Instead, thriving after injury should be the marker of medical success.

Burns are a leading cause of injury death in the province. But for those who survive, their injuries result in short- and long-term physical and emotional challenges affecting their entire life. These range from limb amputations that reduce their mobility to facial burns that affect their appearance and social identity. And while advancements in trauma care have led to far fewer hours spent in hospital, the consequence is that patients must now face many responsibilities for their care on their own.

Committed to a higher level of patient success, Papp launched the Burn Quality of Life Project in 2013. The three-year initiative is funded by a grant from Vancouver Foundation.

“Although there is some general knowledge about quality of life in burn survivors, no research has been done in B.C., and very little in Canada, to understand the issues involved in recovery,” explains Papp. This information gap makes it more challenging to understand the wide range of variables required to treat different injuries over the long term.

Currently, we can only make assumptions that, for example, hand burns requiring surgery may make it difficult to return to work; a severe facial burn may result in increased isolation and lost desire to participate in activities; or a groin burn may cause sexual relationship issues. The goal of the Burn Quality of Life Project, therefore, is not only to see what survivors’ quality of life is, but whether there is a correlation between the type of burn (facial, hand, leg), surgery and ICU requirements, length of hospital stay, and anything in the specific injury that determines what type of problems they will have.

Papp interviewed and collaborated with burn survivors to structure personalized questionnaires designed to identify both the factors that help survivors reintegrate into everyday life as well as the barriers to their success. Questionnaires have been mailed to all 1,250 adult burn patients who have been treated at VGH since 2000. Papp is hoping for responses from at least 300 to 400 patients.

The Burn Quality of Life Project’s survey is unique in its level of detail. It takes into account challenges of survival that were missing from other study questionnaires, ranging from the use of pressure garments for scar management to the financial problems faced by survivors who are the sole breadwinner and are unable to return to work for several months.

“If the project can show the correlation between types of injuries and consequences, we can develop ways to predict future challenges and combat issues as soon as the patient is admitted to hospital to prevent these consequences from ever occurring,” explains Papp. Initiatives to offset these risks could include informational lectures about available resources, counselling, and support groups for survivors with similar injuries.

For Cave, support was most important for recovery. “You can’t do this alone,” she says. “I had a lot of family and friend support, but it was the amazing hospital staff who understood what I was going through, and the limits I have, that made the difference. They showed a lot of compassion.”

Papp would like every burn survivor’s story to have an ending as happy as Cave’s: the young man she had started dating just before the accident eventually became her husband, and they now have two children. She recently published a book, *Fancy Feet: Turning My Tragedy Into Hope*, and shares what she’s learned from her experience as a motivational speaker.

“Because those working at the burn unit never used the words ‘burn victim,’ being a survivor shaped how I saw myself. I considered what I wanted my story to be, and made the choice to stay positive. Determination comes into play. I answer this question every day: Do I want to live?” ∞

To support projects like this that help fund health and medical research, call Kristin in Development & Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation at 604.629.5186 or visit vancouverfoundation.ca/give



Collin van Uchelen (opposite page), aided by his trusty guide dog, Rico (right), offers participants in his popular Heart of Belonging workshop (far right) a new perspective on what it means to be part of a community.



Blind psychology expert Collin van Uchelen deconstructs the process of connecting to one another

By **BARB SLIGL** | PHOTOS VINCENT CHAN

Sometimes vegetable stew includes turnips. Usually it has potatoes, onions and carrots, but it might also include grains and seasonal farmers market produce like squash or zucchini. Each time it's made in one of the workshops put on by Collin van Uchelen, PhD, it's different. It all depends on what ingredients people bring. And that's the point.

The stew serves as a microcosm of community engagement itself. "It's different every time," says van Uchelen, "and that's a metaphor for the diversity you get within a community when everybody is sharing of themselves." It could be a potluck dinner or a community garden plot, but in van Uchelen's workshop, The Heart of Belonging, it's part of an interactive exercise that examines the psychology of community and encourages interpersonal connection and a sense of belonging.

Lidia Kemeny, who oversees the Vancouver Foundation Neighbourhood Small Grants program that funds The Heart of Belonging, attended one of van Uchelen's first workshops in Kitsilano in 2012. She brought turnips as her contribution, and remembers

how simply and effectively the resulting stew demonstrated van Uchelen's point: If you invite people to participate and give them a role, a purpose, you'll foster community engagement. "It's not just about showing up," she says. "In the end, when we all share that stew, you can just sense the ownership that people have in that meal."

It seems rather basic, but the entire workshop takes on another level of meaning when people realize van Uchelen is blind.

Van Uchelen describes his blindness as profoundly disconnecting. "If I have any word to describe its impact, it really *disconnects* me from so much of what's around me," he says. "The visual world, the expressions on people's faces, the look in someone's eye, what's written on the newspaper headline, what's on the bulletin board, the treasure you find at a garage sale, the obstacle blocking your path on the sidewalk. When you lose your eyesight, you lose a lot of opportunity for engagement and connection."

"The core issue for me is that my sight loss has really required me to make extra effort to maintain connection," says van Uchelen. It's part of what makes him so attuned to the psychological sense of

community, and why his workshop is so successful. "Connection through sight is hugely important, but it's not the only way to be connected."

Van Uchelen's sight loss is not an issue in the workshop. He doesn't bring it up except to introduce the volunteer working with him and his guide dog Rico. His condition, *retinitis pigmentosa*, a progressive degenerative condition that eats away at night vision and peripheral vision, hasn't affected his visual acuity as much as it has slowly and insidiously reduced his field of sight. He can see high contrast – car headlights at night, a streetlight against an inky sky or the kaleidoscope of fireworks. "It doesn't get any better than fireworks for me – they're high contrast, bright, moving and flashing. That's how to get my attention," he jokes. Every summer, he heads to English Bay for the Celebration of Light. "It's a fairly intense scene," he says of the fireworks spectacle he's still able to see, "but quite meaningful for me."

Diagnosed when he was 20 – over 20 years ago now – van Uchelen acknowledges that his condition has irrevocably reframed who he is. After speaking to a blind psychiatrist about the trials of med school and rotations for a sightless person, he decided to pursue a career in psychology instead of medicine. Today, he has a doctorate in clinical and community psychology, and he recognizes that his lack of sight may have actually opened him up to a new way of seeing in the context of community versus individual.

For 25 years now he's been an advocate of "collective living," in which residents share living space, meals, cooking and shopping. "It's more fun, lighter impact on the planet, more economical and interesting," says van Uchelen. "It's a way that I can have a bit of a sense of community in my life on a daily basis." He even founded Vancouver's Collective House Network, and much of the material for The Heart of Belonging workshop is inspired by his collective living experience.

It comes back to the tug between community and an individualistic society that celebrates autonomy. Van Uchelen covered this dichotomy in his doctoral dissertation and contribution to *The Handbook of Community Psychology*, asking, "How do people become empowered as citizens in their own communities and lives as opposed to victims or passive recipients of conditions?" For him, empowerment takes place in the community. It's the core of his academic work and manifested in his workshops.

Even before his PhD and post-doctoral work, van Uchelen travelled to Indonesia as an undergrad on a cultural immersion program to study folk healing. In Sumatra, he connected with a *dukun*, or folk healer, who not only ministered to van Uchelen's sight loss but also tweaked his view of the role of culture and community in health and healing. Looking back now, van Uchelen says, "My sight loss ended up becoming a piece of the stuff I'm interested in now." He went on to pursue community psychology at the University of Illinois, study with renowned psychologists, minor in medical anthropology, and work with First Nations communities here in British Columbia. Today, his learning curve continues: he's now studying Braille so that he can better lead The Heart of Belonging.

It comes back to that veggie stew. We're all ingredients in one big pot that meld and simmer and become more flavourful together. The Neighbourhood Small Grants program itself is like that stew, says Kemeny. There's a huge variety in the people and projects that come through Vancouver Foundation. "Collin is unique, there's no question about that," she says, "but the way the Neighbourhood Small Grants program inspires people to share their gifts is not." Whatever the life experience and skill, it's about people willing to connect and share their teachings with the larger community.

Fittingly, van Uchelen's own efforts to promote connection and engagement among others has deepened his own community engagement. After leading the first Heart of Belonging workshop, he was inspired to get involved in Vancouver Foundation's Kitsilano area Resident Advisory Committee. There, he helps to promote the Neighbourhood Small Grants program, reviews applications for funding, and supports successful applicants in making their project impactful. He's also gone on to lead workshops in communities all over metro Vancouver. "This opened a whole new pathway in my life – I'd never heard of Neighbourhood Small Grants two years ago," says van Uchelen. "To be doing what I'm doing now, with the program, is really meaningful and fulfilling." ∞

Find out if there's a Neighbourhood Small Grants program in your area at vancouverfoundation.ca/nsg. You can also help support Neighbourhood Small Grants with a donation. Find out more at vancouverfoundation.ca/nsg



Vancouver Foundation board member Miranda Lam is a young, energetic lawyer set on proving that there is altruism in the courtroom

By CHRISTINE FARON CHAN

When Miranda Lam was five years old, her Catholic school kindergarten teacher asked her to read a passage from the Bible at church. For the shy little girl, the thought of walking up the steps of the church altar and standing at the pulpit, facing a crowd of classmates and parishioners, left her scared and nervous.

Lam's mother, a no-nonsense schoolteacher, saw this as an opportunity to build self-confidence. So for days on end, Lam practised her delivery, reading the passage over and over again, while her mother coached her. When the big day arrived, Lam executed her task flawlessly. "After that," she says, "I thought public speaking was really fun – a great way of communicating with other people."

It was, in many ways, a life-changing experience. Lam overcame her shyness and went on to compete in public speaking championships throughout her school years.

"Being able to tell a story – that, for me, was the most intriguing part, figuring out a bunch of facts and figuring out a way to convey it in a simple and digestible way," Lam shares. Her talent and enthusiasm for storytelling would become fertile ground for the aspiring litigator.

But even as she carefully laid out her career path to law from a

young age, some doubted her choice of profession. She winces at the well-intended words of advice from her Grade 6 teacher. "[She] said to me that I shouldn't become a lawyer because good people don't become lawyers," Lam recalls. "She said, 'You should become a teacher. Your mother's a teacher, I'm a teacher. Look around you – you enjoy and admire teachers. You should be a teacher.'"

Not one to back down from a challenge, the young Lam was more resolute than ever to prove her teacher wrong: good people could be lawyers.

Fast-forward 25 years and Lam, just shy of 40, is at the top of her game. A partner in the litigation group of McCarthy Tétrault, she's a force to be reckoned with in the boardrooms of corporations and non-profit organizations. She's a rising star in Canada's law community, has authored numerous legal articles and publications, and is a sought-after speaker on class action issues, investigations and dispute resolution processes.

So how has Lam managed to dispel the stereotypes of her profession that her Grade 6 teacher warned her about? She takes a refreshing approach to her work: "To me it's a privilege [being a

lawyer]," says Lam. "You get to be in a whole bunch of different people's 'movies'; they generally come to you in crisis and you learn about their business or event in excruciating detail. You help them solve the crisis, you exit out of the movie and they continue on. Hopefully you've done something that has changed things for the better for them."

The drive to help, even in the complex and sometimes cutthroat corporate community, is what makes Lam stand out from the crowd. And she's been recognized for it, too. While still a law student at the University of British Columbia, she was named YWCA

an educator), where she's been noted for her solid leadership skills and sharp assessment of issues at the table. She has also quickly grasped the workings of the community foundation movement, espousing the Foundation's unique ability to convene people on important issues.

As one of the youngest members of the Foundation's board to date, Lam provides unique insight into the next generation of community philanthropists. Despite the lack of optimism in the future cited by many 25- to 34-year-olds in the Foundation's *Connections and Engagement Survey* results, Lam sees an opportunity to engage



Lawyer and sought-after speaker Miranda Lam puts her gift for the public gab to good use, speaking up for community issues and capturing the attention of a younger demographic.

Young Woman of Distinction in 2001. In 2007, she received the Faculty of Law Outstanding Young Alumna Award from her alma mater. More recently, Lam was recognized as one of *Business in Vancouver's* "Forty Under 40" in 2013, and received the Association of Women in Finance PEAK "Rising Star" award in 2014. She's been recruited to a number of boards in the non-profit community – Vantage Point (formerly Volunteer Vancouver), United Way of the Lower Mainland and Imagine Canada, to name just a few.

It was at Vantage Point that she honed the board governance skills that have since become her bailiwick. She laughs recalling her initial reaction when Vantage Point's then-CEO Colleen Kelly approached her to be a member of the board. "I didn't know what a board did at the time – I didn't have any experience. But I stayed with them for seven years and ultimately chaired the board."

That experience eventually shaped Lam's vision of strong board governance as the underpinning of a sustainable and relevant non-profit community. And it also led her to take particular interest in the work and structure of community foundations. So when Vancouver Foundation came calling two years ago, she was excited by the opportunity.

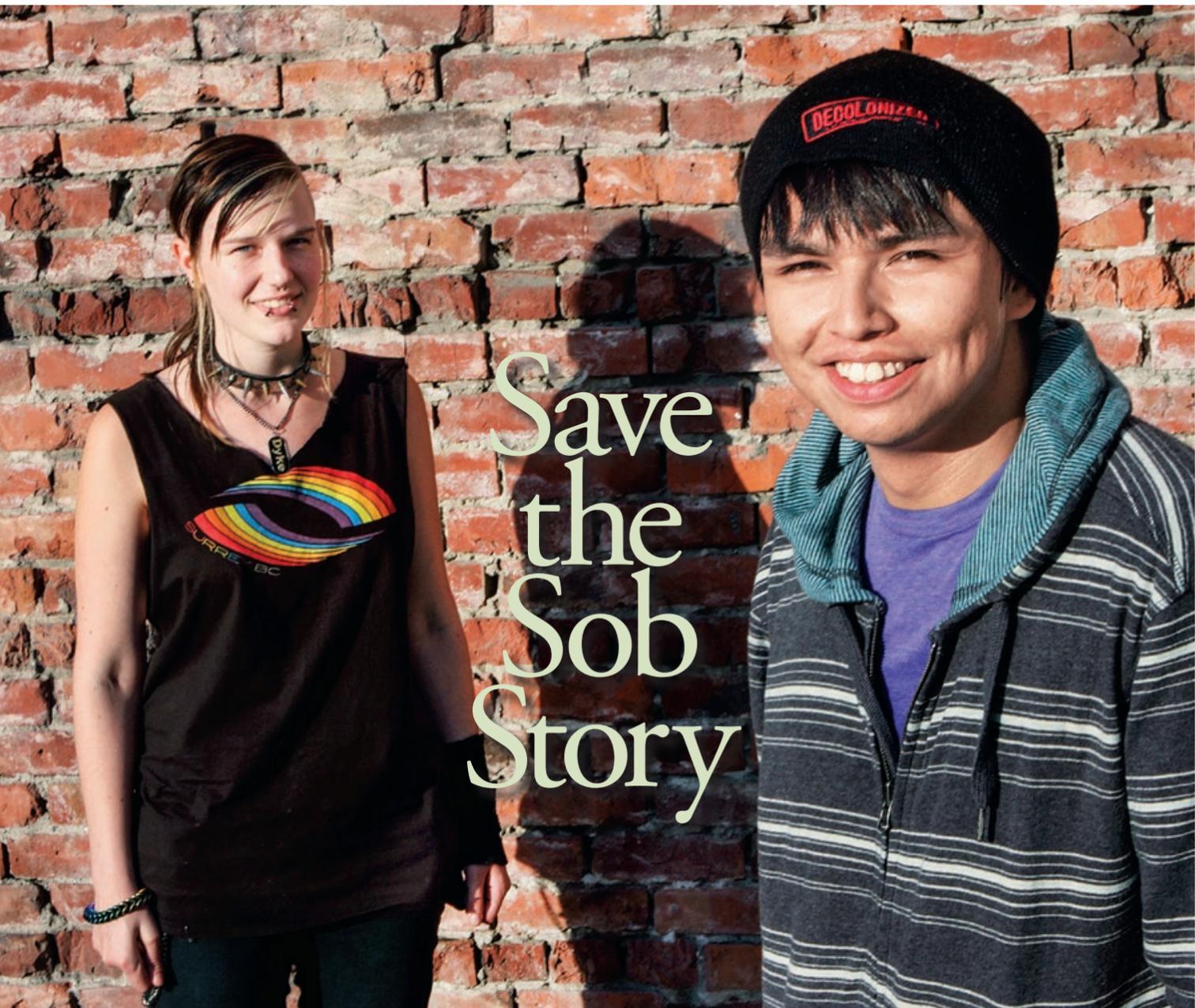
Since joining Vancouver Foundation's board in September 2012, Lam has become chair of the Education Advisory Committee (an assignment close to her heart, given her late mother's career as

a new and younger demographic of philanthropists. "We need to find places for young professionals to connect and give them that opportunity to make some sort of difference," she states.

One of those places is the Foundation's Giving Well giving circle, which brings female donors together in support of projects that address challenges faced by women across B.C. As chair of the giving circle, Lam has made it a personal goal to introduce Vancouver Foundation to more corners of the community, and is palpably excited about the circle's growing success. "We're getting young women interested in the community foundation world and in interesting projects they would not have heard of otherwise," she says. "And they can see how powerful their impact can be when they combine their gift with others."

Lam's commitment to community and civic engagement is rooted in the example set by her parents, who were regular volunteers in school, church and community activities. "It starts with home values," says Lam of the lessons taught by her parents' model of volunteerism. "You're part of something bigger, so you better do something to make your corner of the world a little bit better."

Lam aims to do just that. As a successful lawyer and active community volunteer, she's proof that doing good feels good. And that good people can become good lawyers, and equally good, effective agents of change. ∞



Save the Sob Story

Vancouver Foundation's Youth Advisory Circle conceives a new ending to an "age out" tale

By **WENDY GOLDSMITH** | PHOTOS **TIFFANY COOPER**

You may have seen the picture or read the story: homeless youth from foster care, huddled in a needle-strewn alley, dirty and helpless. Youth in foster care have seen it – often. And it's this damaging "foster-care porn" that they want off the table.

Stories and images have the power to either reinforce or break

down stereotypes, which can shape how groups of people are perceived and stigmatized. Members of Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative Youth Advisory Circle (YAC) are trying to take charge of the stories to help their lives and concerns be better understood by the general public.

Kris Archie, project manager of YAC, has worked with members to lay down these ground rules immediately when speaking with the media. There's no asking of personal questions unless invited to do so – basic manners, but ones traditional media sometimes neglect when speaking to youth formerly in foster care.

But it's not only about the image projected to the public; this code of conduct applies equally to YAC discussions among youth who have all experienced foster care and/or homelessness. It's one difference Shawnee Gaffney, 20, appreciates about YAC.

"[Kris Archie] didn't push us to share our personal stories. She actually promoted not talking about them until we got to know each other a little more." Instead, explains Gaffney, "she asked us what we've got coming up that we're excited about. She totally avoids the past unless you're willing to share."

The philosophy makes sense considering one of YAC's interests: to create a new narrative about youth homelessness and foster care – one that honours lived experience, but examines weaknesses in the system, not in individuals. Each year, around 700 youth "age out" of the foster care system – that is, they turn 19 and stop qualifying for government assistance. Lacking stable jobs and without a place to go, "almost half go on income assistance within a few months" and many end up homeless. In fact, "40 per cent of homeless youth have been in government care," according to a 2013 Vancouver Foundation report on youth homelessness.

YAC meets twice a month for four hours of discussion, planning and dinner. "It's a very diverse group," says Kali Sedgemore, 22. "We're all coming out of care, or are in care. It's a really nice community of people. I've created a few friendships out of it."

A typical session begins with a check-in, when each participant shares some news of his or her week. Next, they look at the agenda and talk about upcoming events – perhaps a task force meeting, interviews with media, media training or grant allocations.

"The biggest thing we do in YAC," says Sedgemore, "is create presentations to bring to bigger meetings to show the work that has been done to change policies around foster care and transitioning out of foster care."

Archie adds, "They've participated in the Mayor's Task Force on Mental Health and Addictions and provided recommendations on engaging youth in service programming and development. They've been talking to local and regional service providers, elected politicians, and staff with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the health authority about developing a 'collective impact' strategy for Vancouver on youth transitions from foster care.

They will be presenting to Vancouver Foundation staff and our existing grantees about their Chicago experience."

That Chicago experience was the National Summit on Authentic Youth Engagement this past August, where Sedgemore, Gaffney and Archie spoke about YAC's efforts to promote a new narrative about foster care and homeless youth. Vancouver Foundation grant-ing has supported the development of video, art, poetry and interactive websites to tell new stories of hope and empowerment.



"The biggest thing we do in YAC is create presentations to bring to bigger meetings to show the work that has been done to change policies around foster care and transitioning out of foster care."
—Kali Sedgemore, 22

Articles that resort to "foster-care porn" – sad, shocking stories of neglect, abuse and/or addiction – may seem sympathetic and useful for eliciting donations, explains Archie. But these stories are not the only truth, and their dark weight can both overshadow an individual's upward climb and draw attention away from an even larger truth – a breakdown of the system. They shape how potential landlords, employers, classmates and neighbours see them even before they know them.

One of the most important lessons from their experience in YAC, say the youth, has been realizing that the difficulties they experienced are evidence of a broken system, not a flawed character.

Sedgemore recalls the hopelessness he felt upon aging out on Vancouver Island. "You get a letter in the mail saying you're getting taken off your Youth Agreement. Basically you're not getting any more money," he explains. "I had no prep, had to pack up my place in three weeks and got a bus ticket back home to Alert Bay."

Gaffney was one of only six Surrey youth accepted into a non-government rent subsidy program through Options Youth Services when she turned 19. That helped, but emotional support from the Ministry of Child and Family Development disappeared abruptly. "It was kind of sad. When I aged out, they got me to sign the papers. [The receptionist] came out and gave me a big hug for 10 minutes because I'd been around her for so long. But the social worker was too busy to come out of her office. She didn't even say goodbye."

Youth Homelessness Initiative

One of Vancouver Foundation's priorities over the next few years is to break the cycle of youth homelessness among young people aging out of government care. Through our Youth Homelessness Initiative, we are working to strengthen community services to support vulnerable youth, engage young people to identify transition strategies for individuals aging out of care, and to raise public awareness about the critical need to invest in solutions that help youth leave the streets behind.



"I got into public speaking [on LGBTQ issues] because I wanted to see change. And YAC is for change as well."
—Shawnee Gaffney, 20

Finding themselves suddenly in a support vacuum, many former foster kids gravitate to "groups," which may teach life skills and can also provide street-connected youth with a sense of belonging as well as adult guidance. Sedgemore volunteers with a cooking group, and blogs for Directions Youth Services Centre, an organization that works with street-connected youth. Gaffney has been speaking at several LGBTQ groups since she was 15. She currently works with Youth For A Change, an advocacy group for LGBTQ youth in Surrey.

Sedgemore and Gaffney's involvement with these action-oriented groups led each separately to Archie, who was known to be actively recruiting youth and wanted to talk about making the transition process better.

"They were talking about youth homelessness," Sedgemore says of the reason he signed up with YAC. "I wasn't angry. It was more of a passion for voicing my opinions about transitioning out of care. About how a lot of times homelessness is linked. I thought I had vital input about it."

After attending a few meetings, Sedgemore found he also relished conducting and reviewing research. He found that citing evidence can be more effective in swaying public opinion than recounting traumatic parts of his own story.

"Research is really important when you're giving presentations. It shows that the system doesn't work and the gaps when you're transitioning out of care. You need evidence when you're presenting to the public."

A self-described data geek and lover of new words, Sedgemore

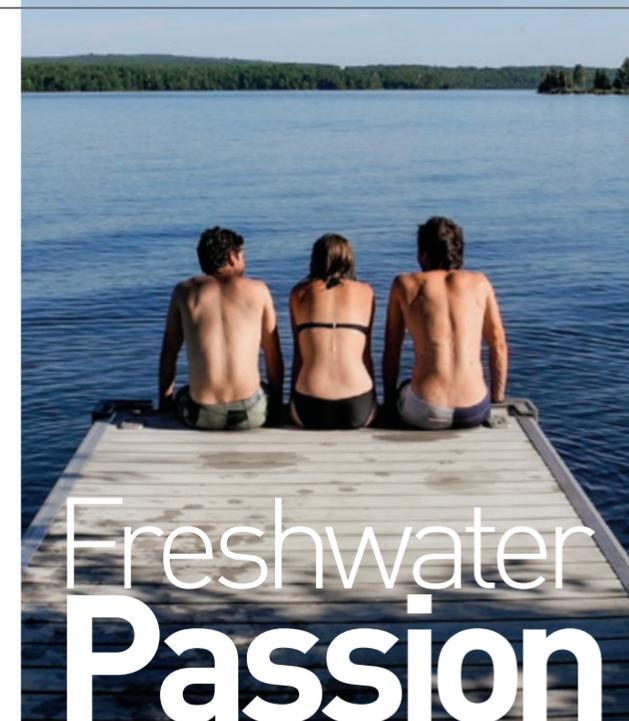
explains how YAC has affected him personally. "YAC has really built up my confidence in who I am. It's built up my people skills and even the way I talk." Improved communication skills helped Sedgemore land a co-researcher position with the McCreary Centre Society. "It's based on the [McCreary-conducted] *Homeless and Street Involved Youth Survey*. I'm really excited about that."

Gaffney joined YAC because she believes in the power of group activism to drive change. "I got into public speaking [on LGBTQ issues] because I wanted to see change. And YAC is for change as well. I don't think I'd be able to do speeches otherwise."

Gaffney plans to continue to accrue more volunteer hours working with youth to meet prerequisites for a college program. "I want to be some sort of outreach worker for LGBTQ youth that are homeless." Her experiences and discussions as a member of YAC have inspired an even stronger drive for activism than she had before. She has seen firsthand how new positive narratives allow youth to bond more comfortably with one another and form partnerships with adult allies. And she wants to tell more of these truths. ∞

If you would like to support young people as they age out of government care, contact Calvin in Development & Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation at 604.629.5357. To learn more about Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative, go to vancouverfoundation.ca/yhi

Environment



Freshwater Passion

When it's time to say, "I love you, lake," nothing beats a message to your local politician

By DOROTHY BARTOSZEWSKI

"People love water. We want to live by lakes and rivers. We hike for hours to see a waterfall. We spend our holidays at the beach. We go to water to relax, to celebrate," says Heather Leschied, the water stewardship program manager with Wildsight, an environmental organization working in the Columbia Basin in southeast B.C.

"But there's often a disconnect between how people feel about their lakes or rivers or wetlands and the actions they take to protect them. The goal of the I Love My Lake campaign is to help people move from just loving their lakes to taking care of them.

"The national component of the campaign is the I Love My Lake declaration, where Canadians explain why they love their lake (or any other body of fresh water) through a video or written statement." The declarations are then sent to elected officials.

Regionally, water stewardship groups work on water protection projects specific to their area. "Vancouver Foundation donors funded our efforts to collect baseline ecological science on a bunch of popular Kootenay lakes," says Leschied.

Leschied explains that shoreline development in the Kootenays is intensifying. "More and more people are building homes and docks and other structures on these lakes. We didn't know how much of the ecological value of the lakes was being lost, because no detailed assessments and monitoring had ever been done. So Wildsight, along with its partners in government, First Nations and

Volunteer Amy Brett collects water samples at Lake Windermere in southeast B.C.



community groups, is recording which species live in or near these lakes and mapping the ecologically sensitive areas, such as important fish spawning habitat.

"This partnership has also developed guidelines and recommendations based on those inventories. The next step is getting those guidelines integrated into lake management plans or zoning bylaws or official community plans, so they can have a long-term impact."

To do this, Wildsight staff are meeting with elected officials from all levels of government to present their scientific findings and promote lake protection options. They are also going to farmers markets, attending lake association pancake breakfasts and holding workshops with community members, so lake lovers can pore over maps of "their" lake, understand its ecology and learn what they can do to protect it.

"We're already seeing positive outcomes," says Leschied. "Some people wanted to set up a water-ski course on a certain part of one lake. But after we explained that the area was important for nesting water fowl, they moved the course to a less sensitive part of the lake, so boat wakes wouldn't swamp the nesting birds. It's an easy change, [and] one that will have a positive effect."

Where should you start? First, Leschied is encouraging everyone to declare their feelings at ilovemylake.ca.

Next, Leschied wants people to commit to taking action. "One person might take weekly water temperature readings off their dock and send it to their local lake stewardship group. Someone else might speak up at local government meetings or plant native vegetation to stop erosion. People can do what works best for them. We want people to know their lakes really need them, and they need to stand up and take concrete steps to look after their lake.

"I believe that Canadians love their lakes and want them to be healthy. We all want the things that make lakes great—the water, the fish, the salamanders, the loons, the ospreys—to be there for not only us, but for our kids and grandkids. This project is just helping people make that happen." ∞

For more information about Wildsight, visit wildsight.ca. To support environmental projects like this, contact Vancouver Foundation at 604.688.2204.



Artful Giving

Renowned Canadian artist Takao Tanabe's legacy is not only his own work, but that of the future artists sponsored by his endowment fund

By LENA SIN | PHOTOS EDWARD MCCREA

Takao Tanabe may be one of Canada's most renowned artists, his 60-year career chronicled in detail by art institutions, journals and the media alike. But there's a lesser-known side to his success story, one that the Vancouver Island painter recalls with utmost clarity: the long struggle not just for his art, but for the financial means to make his art possible.

"Always, money, money, money was short. How to make another few dollars to pay my rent or buy some food or something," Tanabe says of his early years as an artist.

At 88, Tanabe is no longer worried about money. His landscape paintings of the West Coast and Prairies, for which he is known, belong to some of the country's top private collections as well as the Vancouver Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Canada. Bestowed with honorary degrees and prestigious awards, including the Order of Canada, the Order of B.C. and the Governor General's Award, there is little doubt of his stature in Canadian art.

But his early struggles to make ends meet has never left him, and that's why, for years, Tanabe has quietly made supporting young artists a priority.

"I know when I was in their shoes, I was grateful to get any recognition or dollars," says Tanabe.

Since 1997, about 70 students have received art scholarships through an endowment fund Tanabe established with Vancouver Foundation. The donor-advised fund provides seven annual art scholarships through post-secondary schools across the country as well as annual grants to the Vancouver Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Art and other cultural groups.

It's not surprising Tanabe has chosen to focus his grant money on the arts, though becoming an artist to begin with was something of a near accident.

Born in 1926 to a commercial fisherman in the village of Seal Cove, near Prince Rupert, Tanabe had little exposure to art in his youth. High school was cut short, too, when the Second World War forced a 16-year-old Tanabe and his family into an internment camp in B.C.'s Interior. By the time the war ended, Tanabe had moved to Manitoba with only a Grade 10 education. His prospects for employment were grim: mostly manual labour.

He was prepared to do anything to escape this predetermined fate.

"If you had to earn enough money to pay your rent and the only job you could get was preparing work on the road, or working in a wholesale company packing boots in the back – sorting this out, packing this, unpacking that, and saying, 'Is this going to be my life?' How many people would say, 'yeah?' They'd all want to go and do something else to get out of it. I thought, I don't want to be this kind of labourer all my life," he recalls.

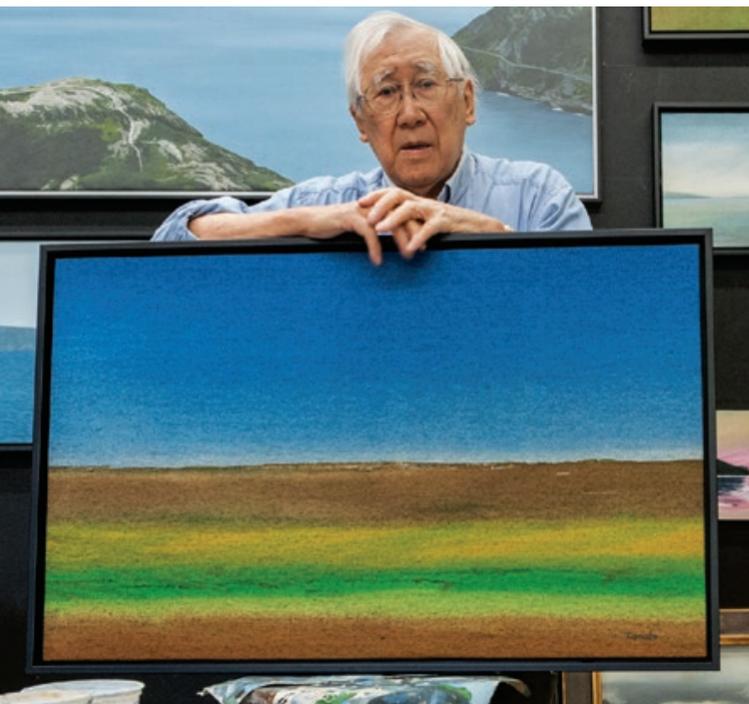
Without a high school diploma, it was impossible for Tanabe to go to university as he had once dreamed. So he turned his attention to becoming a sign painter and, as a special exemption, the Winnipeg School of Art admitted him without the necessary high school credentials.

He scraped by, paying tuition by working at a local foundry and, later, as the school janitor. His education, however, cemented his calling in art.

Tanabe's restless quest to understand art and develop his place in it took him to New York, Vancouver and, for two years in his 20s, between 1953 and 1955, throughout Europe on a \$1,200 Emily Carr grant. A Canada Council Grant also took him to Japan to study sumi painting for a year in 1959.



Takao Tanabe's youthful struggles to launch his career as an artist inspire his philanthropic activities today, just as the natural beauty of Canada's West Coast and Prairies are the inspiration behind his stunning landscapes.



By his mid-30s, Tanabe had begun selling his abstract expressionist paintings through his first art dealer, the Mira Godard Gallery in Montreal (now in Toronto), though he was still a long way off from acclaim and recognition. He took on odd jobs such as dry-walling, and even relied on Godard for rent money for a year, to make ends meet.

Over coffee in Vancouver, Tanabe spoke of his early financial struggles with a candid and clear-eyed recollection. He also recalled with utter delight his first commercially successful exhibition in the early 1970s, a time when he was beginning to transition from abstract art to landscapes.

For the first time, sales from his paintings could conceivably allow him to concentrate on his art without worrying about income. He had, however, signed a contract agreeing to work at the Banff School of Fine Arts, starting in 1973.

"So I phoned the director and I said, 'I've finally had enough sales that I don't need a job. So thanks very much for the offer to be the head of the art department in Banff but I've got enough money, finally,'" says Tanabe.

The director of the school was not so easily swayed. He insisted Tanabe fulfil his contract.

"But it was a good move," Tanabe says firmly. "Because driving across the Prairies to get there, I saw the Prairies flat and I said, 'That's my subject.'"

Tanabe's dramatic landscapes of the Prairies would become one of his most defining subjects, admired for their simplicity of land and sky, as well as his use of colour and light.

As his career took off, Tanabe also immediately set about establishing scholarships at the Banff School of Fine Arts and gave out two or three anonymously every year. It was the beginning of a pattern he would continue for the rest of his life.

"Those who got accepted were grateful they had the chance to come and sit every day and just be artists," says Tanabe. "I think that was the kind of thing that motivated me to say, 'OK, I've got a few dollars, I'll help you because it would've been the best thing in the world when I was going to school and studying if I got a few dollars.' Which never happened, because in those early days there were no such things as scholarships."

These days, Tanabe can still be found working in his studio, located on a remote parcel of land near Parksville, B.C. The moody, mysterious West Coast seascapes continue to inspire him and he has no intention of retiring from painting, or philanthropy, anytime soon.

"Giving to anybody who thinks what they're studying is important – not just to artists or possible future artists. But if the kid is serious enough to want to study something thoroughly and they don't have the money, I think it's wonderful that there are places they can get grants," he says. ☺

If you would like to learn more about how you can give back to your community, call Calvin in Development & Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation at 604.629.5357, or visit vancouverfoundation.ca/give

A Recipe for Self-Esteem

A social enterprise bakery offers hard-to-find meaningful employment for workers with developmental disabilities

BY COREY VAN'T HAAFF

For 18 people with developmental disabilities in Courtenay, life has gone to the dogs – and they couldn't be happier about it. All have found meaningful employment at the Beaufort Association for the Mentally Handicapped's Pet Treat Bakery, a wholesale manufacturer of high-quality, all-natural pet treats. And while the business objective might be to put treats in the paws of every dog and cat in town, the Association's ultimate objective is to build employment success and self-esteem for its workforce while adding dollars to their pockets.

The bakery employs people of diverse ability, paying industry-standard wages for work that utilizes their unique skills and talents, and promotes dignity, respect and self-worth. The business is flexible enough to offer a 28-hour workweek and specialized job sharing so those individuals only able to do certain tasks can still be fully employed.

"This changes people's lives," says executive director Susan Bunn. "They have jobs and are proud they have jobs. They have Facebook pages and they couldn't wait to post that they have paying jobs. Six ladies meet every Saturday for coffee – just like girls working in an office. They're the Liver Queens; they say 'we work there.'"

Bunn says the bakery is more than just jobs and pet treats; her workers shop local, spending the disposable income they have – some for the first time. And people with developmental disabilities now have a higher profile in the community because her workers are out there doing things.

Cindy Cameron is one of those workers. She is lead hand in the Pet Treat Bakery dehydration plant, turning pigs' ears, chicken feet and beef liver into delectable and much-sought-after treats for dogs and cats. She says she needs job support as she talks slower and sometimes doesn't understand. And while she used to work washing dishes in a restaurant, her hours were always casual and she had trouble paying her bills. Today, after four-and-a-half years at Pet Treat Bakery, she is enjoying being a consumer.

"I bought a brand-new TV and bed. Everything I bought – no one has slept on it or used it before. I pay my own bills. I have a bigger apartment and I don't want to move," she says.



She also likes her work as lead hand as it lets her help others, and she says she sees herself working there until she is 90 years old – or more.

"I love it here; a lot of people are like my family. Susan [and others] support me for my job. Sometimes I talk to my team partner and help them do it the right way, not the wrong way. Sometimes [the work] is hard to do, but you get better at it. Sometimes you teach control and attitude," says Cameron. "I'm almost like a boss, but not quite."

There is no doubt the Pet Treat Bakery is a success by any standard. Bunn says the not-for-profit bakery has been "in the black" since it opened in 2010; it's already doubled its sales, and demand has outstripped its capacity. As proof, the bakery has two waiting lists: one for product and another for individuals wanting to work there.

To help meet both sides of that demand, Vancouver Foundation granted \$7,965 from its Disability Supports for Employment Fund (DSEF) toward an expansion that will help the bakery meet the needs of the market and create additional employment opportunities. The DSEF, established in 2003, was funded by the provincial government with contributions totalling \$25 million. Its express purpose is to fund innovative approaches to employment and employability for persons with physical, mental health or multiple disabilities.

Thanks to the grant, the bakery has purchased additional dehydrators and is hiring and training more workers, empowering more individuals to live life with dignity, respect and self-worth. But there is one more benefit to employment that money can't buy, and Cameron gets to experience it each day.

"Every dog and cat where I live, they come to me and think I have treats. They smell it on me," she says. "Every day, a dog licks my shoes!" ☺

If you would like to help support young people with disabilities, contact Kristin in Development & Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation at 604.629.5186 or go to vancouverfoundation.ca/give



Belen Didulo, 74 (near left), stays social by leading the Seniors Shindig every Wednesday at South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (far left and above); Ramesh Kalia, 71 (right), combats her own isolation by volunteering with other seniors.



Senior & Social

Immigrant seniors in South Vancouver are escaping loneliness and isolation through community activities aimed to engage and connect

By **DOUG WARD** | PHOTOS **BRIAN HAWKES**

On a summer afternoon, about 20 elderly women are learning how to dance the cha-cha-cha. They've already done some tai chi, and later will sway back and forth to a CD of Hawaiian music – Don Ho singing “Tiny Bubbles.”

It's the Wednesday Seniors Shindig at South Vancouver Neighbourhood House. Belen Didulo, the gregarious 74-year-old Filipino-Canadian woman who organizes the weekly session, knows why it always draws a crowd.

“As one of the ladies put it,” says Didulo, “they'd rather be out than at home facing their walls.”

Social isolation is a problem for many metro Vancouver seniors, especially for immigrants who may feel isolated from mainstream Canadian culture. New medical research shows what Didulo understands intuitively: social contact is vital to the mental and physical health of elderly people.

Didulo's two-hour dance shindig is just one spoke in the South Vancouver Seniors Hub, a network of activities and services for seniors based at several area community centres and co-ordinated by staff at South Vancouver Neighbourhood House. The Hub concept was created after various agencies concluded that funding for seniors' community programs is fragmented and unstable. The goal was to bring under one umbrella services provided at various community centres in South Vancouver.

The Seniors Hub began in 2011 as a three-year pilot project funded by a grant from Vancouver Foundation as well as financial

support from the City of Vancouver, United Way and Vancouver Coastal Health. It was so successful that it is continuing as a permanent program in Vancouver and is being used as a model by other cities around the world looking to reach out to their local seniors.

When Didulo was resting at home from treatment for thyroid cancer a few years ago, she became convinced that getting outside and becoming active would speed her recovery. “It's nice to be out. You can't stay idle. You have to dress up to get out rather than rot at home. [I] don't like that – it's bad for mental health.”

Didulo started the dance session three years ago when a few of her Filipino friends wanted some recreation during the week. The group now includes Caucasian, Chinese, European and South Asian women. Some of the dancers have a weak grasp of English and so often shift to the left when told to move to the right. Not that anybody minds – their dancing is all about human connection, not performance.

The funders of the Seniors Hub believe that a new approach is needed to deal with the massive and imminent demographic challenge of baby boomers entering old age.

“There was a general sense out there that we have to find new ways to ensure that people have services, are able to age in place in their homes, and that their individual talents continue to be employed,” says Karen Larcombe, executive director of South Vancouver Neighbourhood House. “Immigrant seniors face a lot of barriers – language and cultural barriers, transportation barriers – and are often isolated in their own homes.”

South Vancouver is home to 16,000 seniors, which works out to be the highest percentage of any neighborhood in Vancouver. Many of these older adults, especially immigrants with low incomes, are vulnerable to isolation.

“Not only are they struggling with a lack of awareness of what services are out there to utilize, they are also struggling with low incomes,” says Daisy Kler, Seniors Hub volunteer co-ordinator. “So the chances of them doing something extra, aside from looking for work and surviving, is less than for Canadian-born seniors.”

A report released last year in Britain found that elderly people who are socially isolated and lonely may be at greater risk of early death. Researchers at University College London found that social isolation is bad for health and can lead to serious illness.

Ramesh Kalia, 71, has witnessed the pain of social isolation during her five years as a volunteer working with seniors through South Vancouver Neighbourhood House.

“I visit them in their homes. They are lying there and they are crying. Often their kids don't look after them,” says Kalia. “They feel lonely. They have language problems. They are waiting for someone to share their problems with.”

Kalia herself faced isolation after her husband died of heart failure in 2011. She became depressed and eventually ramped up her volunteer activity, finding solace in helping others. Kalia joined a weekly South Asian mutual support group and became active in outreach programs for isolated and frail seniors. She took computer courses and shared her new skills at various workshops with other seniors.

“Now I feel very proud. The community is helping me because I am learning from them. It is a big thing for me because it is my passion.”

A key goal of the Seniors Hub is more transit service for seniors in South Vancouver, where there are currently only two east-west bus routes between Marine Drive and 49th Avenue. “We have a lot of social isolation here because of geography,” explains Larcombe.

“Some older people just can't get out. They don't drive anymore, there are few buses and they have no resources for taxis.”

The Seniors Hub has canvassed older residents in South Vancouver about their transit needs, even putting together a series of digital film stories about seniors whose lives are constrained by the lack of transportation options. The Hub has also lobbied TransLink to provide more bus routes and consider funding a shuttle bus service aimed at seniors.

In early 2014, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House partnered with United Way to provide a Better at Home volunteer driver program within South Vancouver. It's been so successful that the program is looking at expanding the service to a shuttle bus group-shopping program for seniors who need assistance getting to the grocery store.

It is volunteers like the Better at Home drivers and Polynesian-dance teacher Didulo that are so crucial to the welfare of South Vancouver seniors. They are the Seniors Hub foot soldiers who reach out to their peers, providing information and often emotional comfort.

Didulo worked for 27 years with the federal government in its human resources department. Retirement brought plenty of time alone. “It can get kind of lonely and you either talk to yourself or the TV.” So Didulo increased her volunteer activity, reaching out to seniors who were also adapting to the new stresses that come when there is no longer a job to go to or children and grandchildren to raise.

“The people at my Seniors Shindig are happy. They have come out of their house, they socialize a little and so it feels better.” ☺

For more information on the South Vancouver Seniors Hub, call Shelley Jorde at 604.324.6212 (ext. 136) or visit the website at theseniorshub.org.

To support projects like this that help seniors stay connected to their community and age in place in their homes, call Kristin in Development and Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation at 604.629.5186.

Opera is the stuff of real life for spoken-word artist Shane Koyczan, whose autobiography debuted this October as the Vancouver Opera production *Stickboy*.

Real-Life Opera

Spoken-word artist Shane Koyczan's life story puts bullying centre stage in Vancouver Opera's newest production

By ANDREW FINDLAY

Shane Koyczan is no stranger to deeply personal material. The poetry of this Vancouver-based spoken word artist is rich in social commentary, and often delves with an unflinching eye into intimate and sometimes disturbing subject matter. However, when Vancouver Opera came calling two years ago to ask if he'd be interested in adapting his 2008 autobiography, *Stickboy*, for the opera, he says he was terrified.

"The idea of having other people sing my words and play characters in my life was kind of disorienting," Koyczan says. "When I wrote *Stickboy*, I thought that I would just get this story down on paper, then close that chapter in my life."

Turns out *Stickboy*, Koyczan's fascinating life story, did indeed get a second life in the form of an opera. Thanks in part to funding from Vancouver Foundation, it debuted October 23 at the 700-seat Vancouver Playhouse for an 11-night run, featuring an 11-piece orchestra, five soloists and eight ensemble singers.

Stickboy tells Koyczan's harrowing personal journey from the bullied to the bully – the subject of taunts and harassment as a little kid from Yellowknife, then, after moving in with his grandparents in Penticton in search of a fresh start, becoming the sort of person who had tormented him. There are few topics concerning youth more emotionally charged than bullying, a sad reality of school life for far too many kids, and one brought recently to the forefront of public debate by the tragic 2012 suicide of bullied Port Coquitlam teen Amanda Todd. *Stickboy* is Koyczan's tale of wrestling with and ultimately coming to terms with this demon within.

In 2012, James Wright, Vancouver Opera's general director, had lunch with a friend involved in anti-bullying campaigns who turned him onto *Stickboy*. He found a copy, read it, and was instantly captivated by a story that was rich in the timeless operatic themes of conflict, drama, catharsis and redemption. Yet, unlike Puccini's *Tosca* or Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, *Stickboy* was forged in a contemporary and compelling plot. Wright says the story resonated with him even though he has neither personal experience with bullying nor children to regale him with tales from the playground front lines.

"Essentially, it's a story about being the 'other' – the outsider – and that's a universal theme. But Shane also writes with a certain rhythm and cadence, and I knew it would be terrific on the stage," says Wright.

Wright's attraction to *Stickboy* was also strategic; Koyczan's pop culture cachet, which reached a crescendo when he performed at the 2010 Winter Games opening ceremonies, coupled with a socially relevant story, would help appeal to a younger audience – which, in the world of opera, is under 45.

"Opera still suffers from an elitist, somewhat inaccessible image, and that's something we're very conscious of overcoming," Wright says.

After an initial informal chat between Wright and Koyczan at a local coffee house, the latter went away to wrap his head around the idea of assuming the role of librettist and adapting words from his autobiography to opera. In opera, it's the words of the librettist that come first, but it's also a collaborative process – in this case, involving general director Wright, composer Neil Weisensel, dramaturge and director Rachel Peake, and musical dramaturge and conductor Leslie Dala (dramaturges help research and edit the libretto or musical score in order to tell the story in the most effective way).

After Koyczan had inked a 25-page first draft, the creative team began the first of several workshops. Though it was daunting at first, Koyczan says he enjoyed the adaptive writing process. It was a marked departure from his usual witty and complex sense of word play, which, given the demands of opera, he had to distill into a crisper, simpler prose.

"I really had to unlearn some things and simplify the language so that it can actually be sung on stage," Koyczan says.

Koyczan proved to be a quick study and an adept librettist, and also respectful of the process, Wright says. In opera, that means musical authenticity ultimately trumps textual authenticity, and that can be difficult for a librettist when he's dealing with his own life story. In this case, Wright says the libretto was so strong that there were no major creative conflicts beyond lively discussions and exchanges over how best to hone the text.



(top) Composer Neil Weisensel was drawn to the unconventionality of a production that combines opera with video, animation and sound effects; (below) workshoping the libretto, musical score and staging of *Stickboy*.

Composer Neil Weisensel calls *Stickboy* a dream project because it deals with a compelling and socially potent topic. When the original composer had to drop the project, Weisensel jumped at the invitation and opportunity to work with Vancouver Opera, the country's second-largest opera company and one that he knew would bring excellent production values and singers to *Stickboy*. Weisensel was drawn to the unconventionality of this opera; *Stickboy* incorporates video and animation by the creative team at Giant Ant, which produced Koyczan's viral video *To This Day*, as well as non-musical sounds to punctuate the storyline. And, like Wright, he loved the theme. It had the requisite tension and drama that forms the core of all good opera, but it tackled a subject that's close to the heart of all parents or anyone who's had experience with bullying – either as the target, a passive onlooker who regrets not stepping in, or as a bully oneself.

"When I first saw the libretto I was very impressed," says the Winnipeg-based composer. "Shane was a very good collaborator. He's not a musician, per se, but he works with musicians and he has a great musical sensibility. When he had something to say about the music, I listened – it's his life, after all."

Weisensel hopes and believes *Stickboy* will reach a new opera audience for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the renown and appeal of a hip spoken-word artist like Koyczan. Its fusion of traditional opera with other media, and the fact that it will be performed in English, will also help. In addition, the use of sur-titles – words projected above the stage as they are sung – will ensure that all audience members can follow the twists and turns of the plot.

"As a word, 'opera' comes with so much baggage," says Weisensel. "I really think *Stickboy* could be a game changer."

With the ink now dry on the libretto, Koyczan gets to sit back and enjoy the audience response. He is still moved by the many letters and messages he receives from people touched by *Stickboy*, the book. If his life story, now cast in operatic form, helps reach new audiences, touch lives and promote more dialogue about one of the more troubling challenges faced by school-age youth, then he'll be happy. He says he hopes people will see how tiny little shifts and almost imperceptible changes can happen in a person, how easy it is to go from one to another, from bullied to bully.

"It's hard to step aside and say, 'Okay, here's my life, good luck with it,'" Koyczan says with a laugh, recalling the moment this past summer that he left the finished libretto in the capable hands of Vancouver Opera. "You know people say that 'opera' is a loaded word, but I'm a poet and so is 'poetry.' I'm really excited about it." ☺



If you would like to learn more about Vancouver Opera's *Stickboy* production, go to vancouveropera.ca. To support innovative arts and cultural initiatives like this, call Kristin in Development & Donor Services at Vancouver Foundation at 604.629.5186, or visit our website at vancouverfoundation.ca/give

Photos: Aaron Kostriuk; Caren Tereschak; Angela Wang

Is Your Will Still Effective?

Recent changes to B.C.'s estate laws

By GENEVIEVE TAYLOR, LEGACY TAX + TRUST LAWYERS

As of March 31, 2014, the new Wills, Estates and Succession Act (WESA) has made some important changes that can impact whether a will-maker's wishes are carried out as intended.

Wills that were valid before the change are still valid now – although possibly with slightly different effect. While there are many changes contained in WESA, two in particular are worth noting: 1) changes in spousal status and the effect of separation on gifts under a will, and 2) a significant change to potentially recognize as wills documents that are not formally wills.

Spousal status under WESA is based on either legal marriage or common law relationship (both heterosexual and same-sex relationships). All such relationships have virtually the same treatment under WESA. In keeping with this, under WESA marriage no longer revokes a will (although wills that were previously revoked by marriage prior to March 31, 2014, remain revoked). Under WESA, gifts and appointments, such as the appointment of the executor and trustee, made to a spouse under a will are revoked immediately upon proved separation of the spouses, regardless of whether there is any later reconciliation. A

separated spouse may have rights by virtue of the Family Law Act or its predecessor, the Family Relations Act, but no longer under the wills variation provisions of WESA or the intestacy rules where there is no will. This is a significant change from the prior law.

Another significant change under WESA is that the court can now recognize as wills documents or records that do not meet the formalities normally required for wills. Previously, such formalities were strictly enforced. Now, a record of wishes – even if unwitnessed and possibly unsigned – might be found by the court to be representative of a person's testamentary wishes and accordingly made operative as a will, an amendment or revocation of a will. Such a record need not be a paper document, but could also be electronic (such as an email). Notably, such documents are not automatically valid – a court hearing would be required. The extent to which the court will permit such documents to have legal effect has yet to be determined in British Columbia.

If you're looking to change or revoke your will, it's best to seek professional advice. Handwritten notes on your will or informal documents are not recommended as they can lead to confusion as to their effect, and potentially litigation.

Because informal documents may now impact the distribution of an estate, an executor who is charged with the obligation to search for a will of a deceased person must search in more places than before (including potentially on computer hard drives and smartphones). Under the old law, if a will was improperly witnessed, the executor could disregard it; now, the executor must bring forward all records purporting to have a bearing on the disposition of the estate and a court must determine if they are, in fact, a will. Over time, case law will develop to clarify the scope of such searches and what may constitute a will.

To ensure that your existing estate plan works as intended under WESA, you may want to review it with your lawyer or notary. ☺

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